

Provisional edition

Wednesday 23 January 2019, afternoon

Official report of debates

Opening of the sitting No 6

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL, President of the Assembly): The first item on the agenda is the continuation of the joint debate on the reports titled “Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections” (Document 14669) and “Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda” (Document 14780).

I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 4.45 p.m. to allow for the replies and the votes.

I remind members that speaking time in this debate will be limited to three minutes.

I call Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI.

Debate: Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections / Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda

Mr Zeki Hakan SIDALI (Turkey, ALDE): I congratulate Ms Gülsün BİLGEHAN and Mr Petri HONKONEN on their commitment and hard work.

Despite the existence of national and international standards, electoral legitimacy is not an exclusively legal concept. Election monitors, for example, generally write descriptive reports on elections, rather than indisputable endorsements or condemnation. The absence of electoral legitimacy is generally signalled by statements of international organisations and monitors, but also by low turnout, protests, violence, system crises and the withdrawal of consent. Even very problematic elections can also be highly legitimate in the eyes of citizens, in part because of the lack of an independent media, undermining the process of open deliberation.

For an election or referendum to be legitimate, results must be accepted by international standards bodies and the overwhelming majority of citizens. In contrast, where many or most citizens, and/or the majority of standards bodies and election monitors say legitimacy is lacking, we can say that an election is illegitimate. A non-liberal, non-democratic media environment acts as a weapon against democracy, easing the way to less plural and more autocratic institutions and governments.

In this report:

- speeches in English are reported in full;
- speeches in other languages are reported using the interpretation and are marked with an asterisk (*);
- speeches in German and Italian are reproduced in full in a separate document.

Electoral legitimacy is fundamentally about perceived fairness. Increasingly, governance of mass media and social media is required to guarantee such fairness. Manipulation of public opinion with false news, and co-ordinated and repeated disinformation campaigns, creates voters who are confused and lost in big data. Without a free and pluralist media, believing in the legitimate choice of the public is like believing in fairy tales.

Beyond parties and candidates themselves, the media is the most reliable source for the public regarding elections. Its ability to function freely and independently is essential to a democratic election. A key component of this is ensuring that the media is free and there is proper protection for freedom of expression, especially for opposition. But that liberty alone is not enough; it is also necessary to ensure that the media is not captured by special interests, governing political parties or systematically biased groups or interests. For an election to be fair in the conscience of voters, there should be no censorship of parties and candidates. It should also be fair, controlled by a third party and must not misuse public funds.

It has to be the duty of the international community to set up standards for such an environment with an exclusively legal concept, which has not been the case so far. Otherwise the media becomes a side in elections, rather than a platform creating a fair perception.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD)*: There have been many suspicions regarding the manipulation of information during recent elections, and the issue has been prominent in the media, so this is a timely debate. I congratulate the rapporteurs on their sterling job and pay tribute to Ms Gülsün BİLGEHAN, whose commitment to our Assembly should be emphasised.

As is often the case when we talk about the media, we need to consider the conflict that may exist between the necessary preservation of freedom of expression and the fight against fake news. There are several questions. For instance, how can we ensure that official truth supplants fake news? How can we really establish barriers to fake news? Who is to take the decisions – a judge, an independent mechanism or an ombudsperson? I would like to recall the episode of France's warning to Russia Today for fake news and the threat of closing France 24 in the Russian Federation. If we do not act at the European level, the risk is that we will see sterile neutralisation.

The text put forward by the Council of Europe in December is in the right direction because it seeks to improve detection and response capacity for disinformation while also allowing for a co-ordinated response for all the stakeholders involved. The last two pillars are a crucial asset in combating fake news – encouraging media players to have fact-checking, and respect for a code of conduct. An ombudsman for digital affairs across Europe, the creation of which I advocate in the report I am preparing for the Parliamentary Assembly, could be the guarantor of the balance between making media platforms responsible and respect for freedom of information. None the less, and this is the pitfall we have encountered during the discussion of the law recently adopted in France, the question of penalties in the event of non-compliance with the code of conduct remains a valid one. It is an especially vexed issue because most of the sites incriminated in fake news are not domiciled in the European Union, so the means of intervention are limited.

Public awareness of the need to mobilise civil society to combat fake news is essential. Media education in schools should supplement this system. As we know, young people are particularly sensitive to new technologies and they will be the citizens and voters of tomorrow. The challenge posed by the manipulation of information in our democracies is a huge one, but if we are to rise to the challenge we must do it together by including all stakeholders.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL, President of the Assembly): Dear colleagues, I invite you not to make phone calls in the hemicycle during the debate. Please be courteous, thank you.

Ms Edite ESTRELA (Portugal, SOC)*: I congratulate the rapporteurs on the quality of their work. Freedom of the media, freedom of information and freedom of expression are the pillars of democracy. Without free elections, there can be no democracy. Without a free, pluralistic and independent media, there can be no free elections. And without well-informed voters, there is no proper freedom of choice.

Troubling signs of repression and the violation of media freedom can be witnessed in a number of Member States, as Mr Tornare pointed out. Conversely the change in the media landscape through the expansion of social networks is modifying the impact of the media on the decision-making process in democracies. Every 20 minutes 2.7 million messages are exchanged on Facebook. In the knowledge that fake news has viral potential that is six times higher than true news, how can we ensure that the rule of law is maintained in the

digital world? Last week's issue of L'Obs, the French magazine, alerts us to the fact that the cancer of fake news is attacking democracy. It presented the results of a study conducted by Cambridge University on this issue. We should ponder this and act.

The importance of social media was clearly demonstrated during the most recent presidential elections in the United States and in Brazil. It has also been demonstrated how you can win elections using fake news. The enemies of the democracy of the European Union will be more active than ever, generating fake news with a view to the May European elections. The European Union and the European Commission are preparing an action plan to combat disinformation campaigns. Portugal has already designated its representative for this purpose.

Our Assembly should also adopt effective measures to protect the electoral process and democracy from the threat posed by manipulation of information and propaganda through social media, for example by imposing a code of ethics for technology developers. We must do everything to defend democracy. We must eradicate the cancer of fake news which is eroding democratic life. We cannot accept the inevitability of living in a post-truth era.

Mr George LOUCAIDES (Cyprus, UEL): We can all agree on the importance of multi-faceted and plural access to information regarding political life and democracy in our countries, especially during election time. Nonetheless, even if the obligations stemming from legislation on the mass media to ensure equal representation of all views during the pre-election periods are applied, we cannot claim that there is objectivity and pluralism if, throughout the rest of the year, information is subordinated to political and economic power or business interests.

We have stated from this podium before that the ownership of the mass media is objectively a decisive factor as regards its content and orientation. It is positive that this issue is included in the reports before us. For example, could a channel belonging to an owner who has interwoven interests with a government reveal scandals that affect that government? How could a mass media that is sustained financially through bank advertisements highlight the crimes banks have committed in Europe?

The minimum that is therefore required is the promotion of strong legislation against the horizontal concentration of ownership of the mass media sector, as well as indirect and cross-ownership. Legislation must safeguard in practice citizens' having access to all the information about each mass media – their ownership status, the composition of the capital base and board of directors, the sources of advertising revenue, and the relationship of shareholders with politicians and with banks or companies that undertake public contracts. We must also ensure that public mass media enjoys editorial independence, is genuinely impartial and does not act as the government's voice.

At the same time, we also need a legislative framework on the digital sector, given that the Council of Europe's European Audiovisual Observatory has denounced a digital duopoly, with Google and Facebook accounting for up to 85% of the total growth of the digital advertising market in 2016, thereby threatening the future of traditional mass media. The Cambridge Analytica scandal has demonstrated the extensive power concentrated in the hands of the internet giants, but has also revealed the possibility for manipulation and propaganda on a mass scale.

No one denies that new mass media has created new possibilities for citizens to express themselves and participate in the public debate, but at the same time we have enough evidence and proof that neither political manipulation nor the filing of data is lacking in social media networks. The filters, procedures, automated projection of specific material and the commercialisation of users' personal data remind us that despite the sense of freedom and participation that these instruments give, the ownership issue is the elephant in the Internet room.

Mr Vetle Wang SOLEIM (Norway, EPP/CD): This is a very important debate that we should continue to have both in this Council and in our national Parliaments. As technological development continues with accelerating speed, we as elected representatives must keep the subject of information sharing and the media's role at the top of our agenda.

Even though we as politicians sometimes disagree with a journalist or the media's view on political issues or our opinions, the media must be free from political steering and editorial control. The funding of the independent press has to be without any political strings attached. We as politicians cannot use the media as our partisan microphone to the public.

We have seen in the past few years that social media, disinformation and false news have been affecting national elections. Today it is easy to spread disinformation, especially on social media. I would highlight three things that I see as important. First, we need to work together with the big social media platforms, such as Facebook and Google, to make better and better procedures for removing disinformation. Secondly, we need to have good schools and good education systems, so that the public are trained to see what information is official and correct, and what information is false and incorrect. Thirdly, we need to have good channels for correct and official information from governments. Citizens need a place where they know that the information given is true.

I am glad the report looks at the Norwegian example. Media and news outlets themselves organised a fact-finding news organisation, which investigates different statements from Norwegian politicians, companies and other spokespersons, to find out whether they are correct or not. They end up with a scale from true to false, all dependent on what official facts can provide for clarity. This was a big part of the Norwegian national election in 2017. I think it led to less propaganda-like campaigning and fewer political statements without any basis in fact. We are happy to share our experiences with all of you.

I thank the rapporteurs for an important debate and a good report.

Ms Emine Nur GÜNAY (Turkey, EC): I congratulate my colleagues, Mr Petri HONKONEN and Ms Gülsün BİLGEHAN, on the reports and their hard work.

The role of media, in particular public service media, is indeed worthy of evaluation in terms of ensuring free and fair elections and countering disinformation. However, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that journalism or any other profession cannot be used as a shield against criminal investigations. Turkish legislation does not include any provision that would lead to the imprisonment of journalists on account of their journalistic work. Here, I have a list of 138 journalists who are charged with serious offences, such as being a member of, or aiding, armed terrorist organisations. Some of them were caught while transporting guns for members of a terrorist group, possessing explosive material or hand grenades, and throwing Molotov cocktails. Some more examples? Armed assault on a police car, planting a bomb on a building, robbing a bank, murder and mugging are among the crimes of “detained journalists” in Turkey.

Let me clarify that one more time: investigations into those who claim to be “journalists in prison” are not due to their journalistic work, but due to their acts in support of, or their links to, terrorist organisations. Today, many democracies, including members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, face similar problems especially in connection with terrorist threats. Let us remember the Paris attacks, which were a series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks that took place in November 2015, killing 130 innocent people. If the French officials determine a connection with those terrorists and a journalist, what are they going to do?

We are talking about freedom of the press. What about the dismissal of the German cartoonist Dieter Hanitzsch, because of his drawing of Netanyahu on May 2018? What about CNN ending the contract of Marc Lamont Hill, following controversial comments the liberal pundit made about Israel? What about the Reuters journalists imprisoned while reporting on the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar? What about the killing of Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul? What about the silence of several Western political leaders and diplomats over those tragic crimes? Let us be fair and rational.

To conclude, our priority at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe must be to strike a proper balance between maintaining public order and security, and the protection of the freedom of expression in the media, not to support terrorist organisations.

Mr Vernon COAKER (United Kingdom, SOC): Who would have thought that in 2019, some 70 years after the establishment of the Council of Europe, we in this Chamber would be discussing the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression? I went back and re-read Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It is sometimes worth reminding ourselves of it. It states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.”

In the two excellent reports produced by our colleagues, and in many of the contributions we have heard in the Chamber, we hear that freedom of expression is under threat: there is information disorder, as it is called, or fake news; people are intimidated for holding various opinions and journalists are being intimidated; and

actual censorship is taking place. We do not live in dictatorships or areas with unelected leaders. We are supposed to be mature democracies. We are supposed to have moved on from the times when this happened, yet we have to discuss it in this Chamber.

I can stand up and deplore the situation along with everyone else, but then I thought what can we actually do about it? What do we think can practically be done? Last year, the United Nations had a World Press Freedom Day on 3 May. I ask the Council, our rapporteurs and others with responsibility in this area, would it not be a good idea to have a Council of Europe press freedom day or a European press freedom day? It would not be a gimmick or something we would do just for a good headline, but something practical that challenged each and every one of us, including myself in the United Kingdom, to return to first principles and ask ourselves whether we actually have the freedom of expression, the freedom of the press and the journalistic independence that we all pride ourselves on. I just ask whether that could be considered as we discuss this hugely important topic for all of us here today.

Mr José BADIA (Monaco, EPP/CD)*: Allow me to salute the relevance of the reports that have been submitted, as well as those who have spoken before me. How can we not subscribe to the need to have the freedom of the media that ensures democratic elections? We need appropriate measures to protect and inform the public away from political and economic pressure. The National Council of the Principality of Monaco, which I represent, supports impartial and well-balanced coverage of elections.

The speaker of our parliament, in a meeting with a journalist during new year's wishes, quoted Thomas Jefferson's commentary on the United States Declaration of Independence: "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." A free press enables voters to exercise their freedom of choice when fake news is circulated.

The Principality is a particular case. We are a territory of barely 2.2 square kilometres, with 37 000 inhabitants. We have a very diverse media, including a daily paper, a weekly, three monthlies and five specialised journals. The press is published in Italian, English, German and Russian because our residents are so cosmopolitan. We have radio stations and many digital multicultural media. We must protect those media and ensure that they endure, because they provide fair information and ensure freedom of opinion and the freedom of journalists themselves.

A society without journalists is no longer the same society. A diversified, mature and responsible press that is adjusted to the new forms of information and the reality of the Principality needs a long-term economic model to survive. Given that our audience is so small, we must support the press. That is why Monaco has always provided economic support by increasing the financial package for press advertising and ensuring it is fairly and rationally distributed. That is how our parliament will protect the freedom of the press in Monaco.

Mr Robert TROY (Ireland, ALDE): Both reports are timely and relevant, and I congratulate the rapporteurs on their work. Thomas Jefferson, the former United States President, once said: "the basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." In my opinion, he professed that because a properly functioning free press holds powerful institutions and people with power to account.

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is critical that we support free media to ensure openness, transparency and accountability across the whole of society. Today, the media face many challenges. Although the reports do not explicitly refer to censorship, imprisonment and murder, those practices continue to take place in some emerging democracies and should not be ignored. In 2018, we saw an increase in the number of journalists who lost their lives for doing their job. Worryingly, nine out of 10 murders of journalists remain unpunished. The Council of Europe should support the International Federation of Journalists.

Although the term "fake news" is relatively new, thanks to President Trump, who himself is not averse to false facts, there has always been yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate disinformation. Advances in technology and the explosion of social media have made it much easier to spread fake news to a much wider audience. In the latest edition of Time magazine, Roger McNamee, an early investor in Facebook and a former adviser to the Facebook founder, shares his story about power, privilege and trust, and how it can be abused. He affirmed that social media "has undercut the free press from two directions: it has eroded the economics of journalism and then overwhelmed it with disinformation." The advances in technology will not be reversed, but there must be fundamental changes to business models to reduce the risk to democracy.

There is no alternative to a functioning democracy; free elections are critical. I hope that these reports will put the necessary pressure on governments to act decisively and speedily to support the fourth estate.

Mr Betian KITEV ("The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", SOC): Democratic elections are one of the supreme direct expressions of the power and will of the people. One of their fundamental aims is to give electorates a legitimate opportunity to exercise their political rights and vote for the political parties and candidates of their choice. Elections are essential to democracy, and democratic elections are impossible without the media. The media act as a watchdog, safeguarding the transparency of democratic elections.

They play an important role in all democratic elections by keeping voters informed about the priorities and programmes of the different political parties and candidates, and by educating them. Many argue that the regular, day-to-day reporting of events fails to meet the requirements of good journalism. The media must strike a balance between the interests of democratic citizens and the reality of consumer culture. They must ensure that the interests of the former are not sacrificed for the latter.

The media are not the sole source of information for voters, but in a world dominated by mass communications, they increasingly determine the political agenda, even in less technologically developed countries. There are many ways in which the media can ensure democratic electoral processes, but they generally fall into one of the following categories: the media as a means of ensuring transparency, the media as a campaign platform, the media as an open forum for debate and discussion, and the media as a public educator.

In conclusion, free and fair media can play a significant role in democratic elections. They can educate voters and help them understand candidates' programmes. Social media have the advantage that they reach out to millions of people instantly, proliferating news and increasing views. However, that comes with great responsibility. Media objectivity should be assessed with respect to truth and democratic values. The media should not allow their commercial interests to prevail over the requirements of democratic citizenship.

Mr Andres HERKEL (Estonia, EPP/CD): I thank the rapporteurs for their very good reports on this important topic. Media freedom is an inevitable precondition of democratic elections, but unfortunately it is being severely violated in our Member States. Many other reports deal with this topic, including reports about election observation and the monitoring of countries.

I am grateful to our partners from the OSCE – the long-term observers who scrutinise very effectively what is happening in the media landscape, long before elections – because covert diplomacy among some members of the Parliamentary Assembly has been at a peak. Those people have been criticised, but it is important that we have a larger perspective. It is important that our assessment of the media landscape takes into account new media and developments in social media.

With regard to Mr Petri HONKONEN's report, it has already been said that it is difficult to abolish the term "fake news", but I think he was right to avoid it in this kind of academic text. "Information disorder" is a much better term. What is fake news? It is difficult to explain sometimes. Sometimes when it happens, only 10% of it is fake, but it changes the picture.

The silent pre-condition in the report is that public service media ideally functions independently and is politically neutral, of high quality, is trusted and follows the facts. Of course, there are examples when that does not happen. However, we must strongly support and protect that idealistic view about public service broadcasting.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL, President of the Assembly): Ms Goguadze, registered in the debate, was not present in the hemicycle.

Mr Espen Barth EIDE (Norway, SOC): I commend the excellent report presented by the rapporteur. A lot of wise words have been said on this topic, which is of unique importance to us all. We are all seeing a development in the tone of political dialogue, driven by new forms of media and new uses of old media, which we seemingly all deplore. That is crucial. It is also important that we always remind ourselves that the democratic institutions of competitive elections, the rule of law and human rights are upheld by legal means, of course, but also by a democratic cultural basis – the idea that we speak and listen with respect and that we are able to distinguish between disagreement and attacks on other people.

All the interventions about fake news and hate speech sounded as though only others would deal with the problem. Maybe we have a responsibility ourselves. I have two practical suggestions. First, we should always speak up in favour of our adversaries if they are unfairly attacked through inappropriate means. We can clarify that we disagree with them but speak against attacks that delegitimise the adversary and that suggest motives other than just disagreement. We should also speak up in favour of our adversaries in our national parliaments and in national debates. Secondly, we should abstain from the temptation that I think we all feel to try to use these new tools ourselves when trying to convince each other. It is tempting, but it is dangerous. If we all allow ourselves to be driven into this new tendency towards polarisation, we will be much worse off.

We need to do everything proposed in the report to make sure that the media is able to regulate itself in a good way and promote freedom of speech, and abstain from those things that undermine that whole logic. However, we can also do something ourselves, as in a way we are some of the principal examples of dialogue in society. The word “parliament” comes from the word for speaking, but it is based implicitly on the idea that one person speaks and others listen, as you are all politely listening to me right now. We also listen to see if there is something to learn from the other person, and if we have to disagree with them, we explain what the disagreement is about and we distinguish between opinions and facts. That was my little message to the Chamber. Thank you for the attention.

Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS (Lithuania, EPP/CD): I join everyone in congratulating the rapporteur, and the Committee and its staff, on this mature report. We have two reasons to be worried. First, our media and its independence should be under the shield of our support. Secondly, we have the new issue of attempts by non-democratic countries to create fake news and lying to support their preferred candidates in democratic countries.

A report from the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy on the hacking of democracy will probably be debated in the June session. I proposed it to the Bureau one year ago in Copenhagen. An opinion will also be drawn up by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. We should hear those two sides. One side is on the influence through our mass media – created by non-democratic regimes such as the Russian Federation, China and other totalitarian countries – against democracy in democratic countries. Our duty is to defend the independence of our media.

Even in my country, there was a case just last month when our media freedom was attacked, when somebody tried to investigate our national TV station. Only by four votes in our parliament did we defend the station’s right to be independent. Even in mature democracies and European Union countries there are fights every day for the freedom of the media, so the report has come absolutely at the right time. I hope that the other report on hacking democracy by the German parliamentarian will look at the related issue of fake political news created outside our democratic countries by troll factories, and how we can defend ourselves against that.

I congratulate everybody involved with this fantastic, mature report. With great pleasure I will vote in favour of the amendments and of the much needed report in just a few minutes.

Ms Sirkka-Liisa ANTTILA (Finland, ALDE): I congratulate the rapporteurs on their excellent reports. The topical issues of media freedom, disinformation and propaganda and its effects on democratic elections raise many concerns in states across Europe.

A free, independent and pluralistic media environment is essential for democratic elections. The growing phenomenon of disinformation, propaganda and hate speech challenges the democratic process. The electorate cannot enjoy genuine freedom of choice if that choice is not well informed, as is well said in Ms Gülsün BİLGEHAN's report.

The electoral process must be better protected from manipulated information. Traditional media are subject to various obligations to ensure balanced and impartial news content. However, social media platforms have taken on the role of being publishers but without the editorial responsibility. In addition, social media can easily create so-called filter bubbles that feed us black-and-white thinking and reinforce divisions. As a result, there is a lack of meaningful debate, with Internet users seeking like-minded people to strengthen their own biases. The combination of a lack of analytical coverage by the traditional media and the sometimes negative role played by social media challenges critical thinking.

I agree with Mr Petri HONKONEN that Member States should support research on information disorder to understand its impact on the public. At the moment we are working in the dark. We know that disinformation is being spread through social media, but it is hard to grasp the whole picture and draw conclusions about its effects on the public. However, one thing is clear: we must educate ourselves and future generations in critical thinking in order to learn how to separate false news from facts. We also need more established fact-checking and myth-busting platforms to tackle false claims and incorrect information. In addition, political ads must comply with applicable laws, including revealing their sponsors. Social media platforms should clearly establish their legal responsibility to counter illegal content.

Public service media also plays a special role in focusing on matters of public concern and providing the public with reliable information and a diversity of opinions. Public service media should engage in countering disinformation by developing educational programmes for the general public and encouraging a critical approach to information and sources, as Mr Petri HONKONEN rightly suggests.

Ms Zita GURMAI (Hungary, SOC): We welcome these reports on media freedom and public service media. I fully support the rapporteur's view, in the sense that Member States should guarantee the independence of public service media and must halt their efforts to influence it or transform it into government media.

According to Hungarian Government communications, Hungary is deeply committed to promoting and protecting the freedom and pluralism of the media, as well as granting equal access to media content for everyone. They say that the Fundamental Law stipulates that everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression and that Hungary recognises and protects the freedom and diversity of the press. The government representatives emphasise in international forums that Hungary further advocates a balanced and diverse media market, thereby enforcing plurality in the media landscape.

After the 2018 general election in Hungary, the OSCE's official report stated that its media monitoring revealed "clear patterns of political bias on the part of the public broadcaster", as was obvious, given that the opposition parties were given just five five-minute studio interviews during the whole campaign. Many parties have been given no studio interview time since, even with one TV channel broadcasting 24 hours a day.

The recent events in Budapest also demonstrate that the Hungarian Government's statements are not true. We cannot talk about equal access to the media for everyone. When Hungarian opposition MPs first officially entered what is a Hungarian public building to question this one-sidedness, they were not allowed to talk to any editors and some were thrown out by security guards. Security guards denied MPs access to part of the public building, claiming that the stairs were slippery. Video footage was later leaked showing a public media reporter blatantly instructing a "legal expert" on what to say about the removal of the opposition MPs.

We cannot talk about diversity of the press or plurality in the media landscape in Hungary when the majority of the Hungarian media is owned by Viktor Orbán's stooges. The new Media Foundation was created, with more than 500 outlets. Formally independent media owners gave their media outlets to the foundation for free, which is unprecedented. The foundation is headed by a former Fidesz MP. He and a current Fidesz MP make up two-thirds of the board of trustees, so it is quite clear that the governing party directly controls the Media Foundation. Moreover, the Competition Authority could not examine the huge media concentration at the foundation, as the Prime Minister declared the Media Foundation to be serving "the national interest".

I attach great importance to these reports because I hope they will draw attention to the situation of the media in Hungary.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL, President of the Assembly): Mr Boryslav BEREZA, Mr Serhii KIRAL and Mr José CEPEDA are not here, so I call Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW.

Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW (Sweden, UEL): I thank the rapporteurs for these timely and relevant reports and for their important recommendations, which I fully support.

Media freedom is an essential condition for any free and democratic society. However, we must appreciate the complexity in addressing, on the one hand, the universal acknowledgement of the importance of free media and freedom of speech and expression as the bedrock of any democratic dispensation and, on the other, our ability to prevent the abuse of the same rights, thereby causing harm to individuals, communities and national security. The political ability to strike a balance between providing strong protections for the right

to freely express oneself and access information and for media independence, while also allowing for appropriate restrictions on the very right that we believe to be indispensable to protect the integrity of the individual, community and state, is inevitably a highly complex task.

In recognising this complexity, we also need to discuss and examine how states apply restrictions to these freedoms through the use of measures or legislation that are not compliant with the fundamental freedoms that we claim to protect. Every day we see how much hatred is spread among millions of people under the mantle of “freedom of expression”. We see how policy makers hide behind freedom of expression to spread hatred and divisive rhetoric through the media. We see how journalists are victimised and human right defenders threatened and, in some cases, murdered. All this is done in the name of freedom of expression. We see how anti-migrant rhetoric, Islamophobic rhetoric, Afrophobic rhetoric, homophobic rhetoric and so on is spread, creating an atmosphere of fear and preventing these communities from leading normal lives.

Freedom of expression and the media is the bedrock of any democratic dispensation, but we must equally recognise the inherent limitations to these freedoms, both for ourselves as legislators but also for the communities and countries that we lead. Freedom of expression does not include hate speech, incitement to hatred or violence. We need to recognise this at all times. This is a complex task, but we face an extremely serious situation and the Council of Europe needs to take leadership on it.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL, President of the Assembly): Ms Jaana Maarit PELKONEN is not here, so I call Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO.

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco, ALDE)*: I congratulate the rapporteur on the excellent work done on behalf of the committee.

Member States of the Council of Europe have always been at pains to promote a democratic image. One only has to think of the increase in the number of election observation missions organised at the request of certain countries when organising national elections. Some would limit action in favour of democracy to the mere fact of organising elections. Others seem to believe that freedom of thought and expression are the essential hallmarks of any democratic country. The role of political men and women is therefore essential. We have a responsibility to uphold these freedoms, and all the more for those who are part of a governing majority.

I do not think I need speak out on the need to protect journalists as it is self-evident. Similarly, regulating opinion-shaping bodies – the press and social media – is essential in democratic societies. After all, public opinion is easily influenced.

I think we all have in mind part of a statement taken out of context, or the choice of a photograph that can sway part of the electorate. These practices are despicable – and often despised. The press has to be transparent, with a clear editorial line. Readers and listeners need to know the political bias or allegiance of a given press organ. Only that can guarantee that information is understood in its context. Whether we are talking about the right, the left, the centre or a political party governing by majority is not important. What is important is that one knows the political bias or allegiance of a press organ.

I had a great-uncle who, to form his own assessment, read a right-wing paper, a left-wing paper and a more neutral paper. His assessment was spot on, but that was possible only because he knew the political bias of the newspaper he was reading.

The difficulty, of course, is social media, which is far more difficult to regulate and whose outreach means that it is potentially far more dangerous. We have seen hoaxes proliferate and defamation relayed at the speed of light under cover of anonymity. That means it is very difficult to hold people accountable. Anonymity and the lack of any clear attribution of political allegiance are the major obstacles to imparting information that respects our democratic societies.

Mr André GATTOLIN (France, NR)*: This debate is rich and the report elaborated on by our colleagues is excellent and relevant. This is, however, just one phase of our reflection and we need to ask the proper question. We cannot confuse the freedom of the press and freedom of information with the quality of information. You cannot have quality information if you do not have freedom of information, but freedom of information does not really create quality. We see it today: there is so much information and we have deregulated ways of producing it, particularly on social networks, where everybody has an opportunity to have their say, although this does not necessarily guarantee quality.

I turn to a similar historical case. Before the First World War, in most of our countries journalists and the press had no status. I have written a thesis on journalistic hoaxes; the spread of fake news was even greater in the 19th century than in the 20th. Trade unions have been created, charters established and rules and regulations passed to protect journalism, but these were also imposed on editors during the First World War. Excesses were practised by different countries, so we are in a somewhat similar situation. We have media that have no true editorial line.

In drawing up its directive on electronic trade, the European Commission was not exactly clairvoyant. We are not about to give editorial responsibility to the different servers. At the same time, we have created social networks that create uncontrolled information. If we want a free information service, or services, we have to think about self-regulation and regulations in general.

A very good initiative, the Journalism Trust Initiative, was undertaken by Reporters sans Frontières to provide greater confidence and faith in journalism so that criteria are established for the publication of information. One should not hesitate to do what we want to do in France, although the Commission does not want to do it, which is to design laws for the social networks.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr Andrii LOPUSHANSKYI and Mr Konstantin KUHLE are not here, so I call Mr Tommy SHEPPARD.

Mr Tommy SHEPPARD (United Kingdom, NR): I fully agree that a free press is an essential prerequisite for a democratic society. By “free”, I mean it should be free to criticise and hold to account those in power and should have an obligation to provide the fullest information to citizens so that they can make informed choices.

But what do we do when the press is free but not fair? Let me illustrate through personal example. I represent the Scottish National Party, the largest party in Scotland. We are a left-of-centre organisation advocating political independence for Scotland. We have been in government in Scotland for 12 years and we hold 60% of the Scottish seats in the United Kingdom Parliament. My party polls between 40% and 50% in elections, yet when I stood for election in 2015 only one of 37 newspapers available in the country supported my party.

Now, I do not particularly complain about that; it is a consequence of the ownership of the media. It is no surprise: if the media are owned by rich and powerful people who have no interest in supporting political or economic reform, they will not support my party. I would argue, however, that if the management of the media is to be for private gain, its operation ought to be in the public interest. That is why it is important that we have public interest frameworks that try to regulate how the press works.

There are three essential components to this. First, there should be a requirement to provide balance between opposing views. Secondly, there should be a proper and thorough right to reply so that if someone feels aggrieved, they can express their point of view. Thirdly, there ought to be a requirement not to publish anything as fact unless it has been checked and verified – something that used to be a hallmark of decent journalism.

If there is concern about the print media, concern about online media is surely even more intense. There is no regulation of the digital sphere in my country. In effect, we have a “wild west” operating without rules or regulations, which has resulted in a cacophony of opinion and abuse, with evidence and fact very thin on the ground. But we need to recognise that, while social media has input from millions of individuals, the majority of it is controlled by platforms operated by multinational corporations. We need a serious dialogue with these corporations about their social responsibility. To start, I am happy for that to progress on a voluntary basis, but I say this: many of our citizens are getting increasingly fed up with what is happening online and their inability to get their voice heard. So if voluntary regulation does not work – though I hope it will – we must be prepared, as governments and states working together, to seek some international regulation of online media.

Mr Koloman BRENNER (Hungary, NR)*: It is an honour to speak before the Assembly about these two reports. I was present at the drafting of the report by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media; wonderful work was done and the report is very much up to date.

I should like to give a couple of relevant examples from my country, Hungary. The last campaign, prior to the elections in April 2018, perhaps gives a good example of how an over-dominant government party basically occupied the public and private media. The latter had been bought out by oligarchs who supported the government and simply blocked politicians' access to the media, so that they could not present their ideas and political principles prior to the elections.

In addition, a number of important leading politicians from my Jobbik party were attacked; they were accused of lying, with various such accusations being made against them just prior to the elections. Approximately 200 court cases have been won against the media where it has been shown that they have lied about our major politicians – about our key figures – and about our party. All of the cases of course ended after the elections – that was when the rulings were issued. So in this serious year for Europe, with the European Parliament elections in May and the local elections in Hungary in October, it is key for the government to reach its political objectives. In these serious circumstances, I hope that these excellent reports will finally be implemented in Hungary and in other corners of Europe where this is ever so needed.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr Oleh LIASHKO is not here, so I call Ms Branka STAMENKOVIĆ.

Ms Branka STAMENKOVIĆ (Serbia, EC): The proposed draft resolution mentions and seeks to introduce the term “information disorder” to describe the situation where disinformation, mal-information and misinformation create a slanted picture in the public mind. I propose a fourth category whereby information disorder is created: through the lack of information. Unfortunately, the filtering out of information when media are reporting on important political issues is a big problem in my country. All we ever hear in the media in the four years between elections, including on the public service broadcaster, is what the ruling majority is doing. Opposition parties have absolutely no access to media, until 30 days before elections. It is not possible to undo the four years of non-information in just a few appearances in the month before an election and it is not possible to properly inform the public so that they can cast an informed vote.

That is a big problem, and I completely support the proposal that we need to develop standards and indicators to monitor the situation in the media in the context of free and fair elections. If there is no access to media, enabling all relevant political parties to present their different policies, throughout the period between elections, there is absolutely no chance that the result of the elections after these four years is going to be free and fair.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): That concludes the list of speakers.

I call Mr Petri HONKONEN, our rapporteur, to reply to the debate. Mister Honkonen, you have five minutes and seven seconds.

Mr Petri HONKONEN (Finland, ALDE, Rapporteur): Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues, I thank you all for your comments and views. First, I intend to underline the importance of countering this information disorder and propaganda in all countries, in all Member States and in all societies. The speech by our Polish colleague, Mr Krzysztof TRUSKOLASKI, reminds us all of how important these reports and recommendations are, given the situation in Europe at the moment. Broadcast news – be it the media, public or private – is under pressure in many countries. The aim of this report is not to downplay the role of privately owned media in the fight against information disorder; we need everyone and we need co-operation. However, public service media often has better resources to carry out research, adopt new methods and counter information disorder, while developing quality journalism. We have many good examples of this in our Member States, and public service media have a responsibility to lead this fight against disinformation.

I well understand the views of our British colleagues about the sometimes dominant role of the public service broadcaster. In my country, Finland, our public service media often face the same accusations, even from my own party comrades. However, I believe that we need public service media and public service broadcasting, and that it may have the key role to play in the fight against this phenomenon of information disorder, if these public service media outlets are totally independent of the government and the quality of journalism is high. Journalists make mistakes, just as we all sometimes do in our professions, but if journalists respect their principles and standards, and can work independently, there will not be big problems, because standards of good-quality journalism are universal. One basic value for journalists lies in isolating their own political opinions from their work. Freedom of speech and freedom of media comes first, with ideological views second.

Public service broadcasters are often well resourced. The aim of this report is to provide encouragement; to underline what good platforms these broadcasters are in terms of developing methods, educating, source criticism, creating digital content and fact-checking; and to spread these good practices throughout the media environment. When public service media can once again work independently from the government, it is easier to see behind the owners and their perspective.

Free media is a precondition for a modern, open and democratic society. The phenomenon of disinformation and propaganda is eroding that basis in many ways in many Member States of this Council of Europe. We, as politicians and decision makers, have the responsibility and possibility to provide the freedom of the press and protect journalists, allowing them to do their important work and fulfil their core role in building a modern and open society in Europe. It depends on us.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, rapporteur. I now call my very good friend, the very distinguished Lord George FOULKES. You have a little more than five minutes.

Lord George FOULKES (United Kingdom, SOC): Joe, it is a great pleasure to see you in the chair today. I am tempted to tell you that a friend of mine thought that the Irish backstop was the full-back in the Irish rugby football team, but I think I had better answer this excellent debate, which has had a huge number of participants.

Everyone here who wanted to speak has been able to speak, and I can deal with only some of the highlights. I was impressed by the fact that in their referendum the wise Swiss people voted overwhelmingly in favour of keeping the licence fee, which is a good encouragement for public service broadcasting. I was also impressed by the suggestion of my good friend Vernon Coaker that we might consider a European press freedom day. I hope that we take that up in the appropriate way.

Several colleagues mentioned fake news and someone mentioned the Russian broadcaster RT in particular. I am taking that up in my own parliament next Monday. If we want to do something about fake news, however, it does not help us that the President of the United States is one of its greatest participants or providers.

Several people mentioned the need to find a way to make social networks – Google, Facebook and Twitter – more responsible and more accountable. Rightly, a number of people said that the only way to do that effectively would be through some kind of international action. That is certainly what we need to do.

Concern was also expressed about hate campaigns. That situation is developing a bit in the United Kingdom, and I fear that it might get worse with the Brexit campaign and the bi-partisanship and polarisation that is taking place in my country.

Several participants also expressed concern about the narrow ownership of the media and the way they are controlled. Mr Tommy SHEPPARD raised that in his powerful speech. I did not agree with everything that he said, but I certainly agreed with that aspect. We need to look at that further.

I was going to take up Sir Edward LEIGH's point about the BBC, but it was better answered by Mr Petri HONKONEN. As an impartial observer from Finland who came to London and saw the work of the BBC, he gave it a high level of approval, which I am pleased about.

Several colleagues mentioned the importance for the Parliamentary Assembly of dealing with social media and media education. A number of people, including my colleague Ms Angela SMITH, also raised another issue that I am particularly concerned that the Assembly should deal with – media freedom and the threats to journalists. Those threats can include murder, as mentioned by a number of people, some of whom come from countries that are facing that real threat to journalists.

I am glad to let you know that the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media is working on a number of reports on that matter. Someone suggested setting up a working group, but I do not think there is any need, because we are already dealing with it. We have reports on “Are social media contributing to limiting freedom of expression?”, “Media education in the new media environment”, and – the one that I am dealing with – “Threats to media freedom and journalists' security in Europe”. That is something that we will take seriously.

We will also continue to follow the issue of public service media, which has been discussed at length today. If you are able to come along, we have a hearing tomorrow at 8.30 a.m. in room 6 on “Public Service Media in transition: challenges to face and ways forward”. We will work on all those issues with an understanding of their crucial importance for our democratic societies.

I have to say two thank yous. First, I thank the Secretariat, which provided me with the background, helped to produce the reports and did a wonderful job – as the whole Secretariat does, despite facing economic and financial pressures. Secondly, above all, the main credit for the report should go to Ms Gülsün BİLGEHAN, who I am glad to say has been following the debate from Ankara. She tells me that she has been really excited by the debate and has found it a great tonic to hear all the things that have been said. I am sure that the Assembly wants to wish her and all her colleagues well in their fight for media freedom and against the threats to journalism in Turkey. We thank her for her great contribution to the Assembly.

Vote: Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections / Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Lord Foulkes. The debate is closed.

We now come to the first of the two resolutions we have to consider which is “Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections”, Document 14669.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft resolution, to which 17 amendments have been tabled.

I understand that the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media wishes to propose to the Assembly that Amendments 15, 1, 10, 11, 2, 12, 3, 13, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 8, 9 and 14 to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved by the committee, should be declared as agreed by the Assembly.

Is that so Lord Foulkes?

Lord George FOULKES (United Kingdom, SOC): Standing in for our chairperson, who has had to return to Spain for a vote in the parliament, I am very happy to say that that is exactly the case. We recommend the acceptance of all those amendments.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Does anyone object? That is not the case.

Amendments 15, 1, 10, 11, 2, 12, 3, 13, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 8, 9 and 14 are adopted.

We will therefore now consider Amendment 16. I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds. I call Mr Jaak MADISON to support the amendment.

As Mr Jaak MADISON is not present, the amendment is not moved.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 14669, as amended. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The draft resolution in Document 14669, as amended, is adopted, with 85 votes for, 2 against and 6 abstentions.

We now come to the second resolution we have to consider which is “Public service media in the context of disinformation and propaganda”, Document 14780.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft resolution, to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the whole of the draft resolution contained in Document 14780. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The draft resolution in Document 14780 is adopted, with 90 votes for, 4 against and 2 abstentions.

The next item of business this afternoon is the debate on the report titled "Internet governance and human rights" (Document 14789) presented by Mr Andres HERKEL on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media.

I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 6.05 p.m. to allow for the replies and the votes.

I remind members that there is a three-minute speech limit in this debate

I call Mr Andres HERKEL, rapporteur, to make his presentation. You have 13 minutes in total, which you may divide between presentation of the report and reply to the debate.

Debate: Internet governance and human rights

Mr Andres HERKEL (Estonia, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): The Internet is penetrating our everyday lives. I am sure that many of you are using it right now, even during this debate, and we are fully free to do so. Unfortunately, this tool does not have only positive aspects; it is also misused and abused. We must therefore talk about it in relation to human rights.

We want an Internet that provides our societies with more information and knowledge, innovation and sustainable development, social justice and collective wellbeing, freedom and democracy. To achieve that goal, there is one important precondition: the protection of human rights on the Internet. In 2011, the Committee of Ministers adopted the declaration on Internet governance principles, which states: "Internet governance arrangements must ensure the protection of all fundamental rights and freedoms and affirm their universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation...They must also ensure full respect for democracy and the rule of law and should promote sustainable development. All public and private actors should recognise and uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms in their operations and activities, as well as in the design of new technologies, services and applications." In short, human rights, democracy and the rule of law are, and must remain, the key goals of Internet governance.

The report focuses on a short list of human rights that we must preserve together. We must guarantee the possibility for everyone to access to the Internet, with no discrimination. It is important to ensure that the Internet is, and continues to be, an open ecosystem. We need to strengthen the protection of freedom of expression and information. Of course, it is also important to maintain privacy and protect personal data.

I will focus on just a few of the issues. The first is the right to an open Internet. The principle of net neutrality is under threat in Europe from different forms of state censorship and certain operators' practices. There is a clear requirement for greater transparency on the indexing and ranking criteria employed by app stores.

The second issue is the right to security. The "security by design" principle is crucial for the main Internet architecture and computer infrastructure of essential services. The first responsibility of developers and vendors is to deliver the safest products. In this respect, there is a need to develop harmonised international security standards.

The third issue – a prominent one – is that of artificial intelligence. With regards to Internet security, artificial intelligence is already in the battlefield, and there are new security issues. This is a sensitive and very complex question, which I could not explore in the present report, but which will deserve our attention in the future.

My last remark concerning the human rights at stake relates to the protection of privacy and personal data in cyber-space. This is a domain where business interests are still prevailing over Internet users' protections. Big companies are eager to have as much personal data about us as possible. There will be a separate report on this topic, to be discussed in our committee.

The question for the future is: to what extent is it possible for the Council of Europe and its member states to operate more effectively within the existing Internet governance ecosystem in order to uphold basic rights and secure their concrete implementation? That is the focus of chapter 3 of my explanatory memorandum.

In order to enhance decision making on Internet governance issues, we should first agree on guiding principles. The most important guiding principle is the multi-stakeholder approach. Good Internet governance should be multi-stakeholder and decentralised, transparent and responsible, collaborative and participatory. Of course, a serious challenge is how to ensure the satisfactory and, at the same time, fair representation of

the various categories of stakeholder, but there are possibilities to co-operate with associations, federations and so on. With regards to transparent and accountable governance, I stress that transparency first and foremost requires us to have a precise understanding of who decides what; that must be very clear.

There are serious problems that we cannot solve alone. One of these is cyber-security. I wonder whether it would be possible to strengthen the existing forms of co-operation. They are in our hands and are functioning, but there may be the possibility of creating a specific monitoring mechanism, and establishing crisis management and post-crisis analysis, by sharing the resources that already exist in various countries and in the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security.

I am eager to hear the discussion and will use my last four minutes at the end of the debate; many thanks.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Mr HERKEL, you will have 4 minutes left to respond to the speakers.

The general discussion is open. We start with the spokespersons of the groups.

Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ (France, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group)*: The rapporteur's outstanding report provides a comprehensive landscape of this essential tool – the Internet – but it also prompts us to look at the huge challenges we will face as citizens and as lawmakers. Among the issues addressed in the report, the question of freedom is fundamental. It includes freedom of access and of expression, but that freedom should not lead to excess.

Many recent studies, especially of young people, have demonstrated that cyber-violence and cyber-harassment account for a major proportion of attacks suffered by young people and women. Some 32% of girls in France aged between 12 and 15 claim to have been victims of verbal violence on the Internet. This violence, facilitated by anonymity and a feeling of impunity, is a real problem.

To guarantee the genuine exercise of the right to freedom of expression, it is crucial that we ensure that any person may be freely heard online without having to fear violence or other abuses. In a study of freedom of expression by women on social media, Amnesty International stressed that 23% are insulted or harassed online because of opinions that they have expressed. It is therefore necessary to make the social network platforms themselves aware of their responsibilities. At the very least, they should act if abuses are brought to their attention. That seems to be far from the case for Twitter, for example. As lawmakers, we should give the necessary resources to specialised bodies such as cyber-brigades in the police or independent bodies such as the National Commission on Computers and Freedom, so that they can exercise their role.

Freedom also includes access to diverse and sometimes contradictory information. It is only meaningful if ethical rules applied to traditional journalism are respected. The development of fake news demonstrates that this is not the case, and it is a threat to our democracies, as stressed in the report. On this point, initiatives taken by journalists themselves, such as the self-regulatory mechanism of the Journalism Trust Initiative, are vital. The process of making stakeholders accountable is essential for supporting an informed citizenry without restricting freedom of the press, which is a linchpin of our democracies.

Internet governance is a challenge and we should probably innovate as lawmakers in order to control excesses without ever forgetting the principle of freedom which is intrinsic to the Internet.

Mr Martin WHITFIELD (United Kingdom, SOC, Spokesperson for the group): I join the previous speaker in acknowledging the hard work of the rapporteur and the excellence of this report. We are all aware that the Internet is crucial to our society – to businesses, to individuals, to families, to communities and to society. But it needs to be free, it needs to be open and, most of all, it needs to be secure. Those three areas are dealt with in the report.

The responsibility for governance rests on all Internet stakeholders: it will not simply be answered by governments, by us sitting here, or indeed by individuals who use the Internet. A model of Internet stakeholder responsibility has been endorsed by the United Nations Secretary General. To echo the report, governance must be based on the protection of human rights.

The report highlights that universal access to the Internet is a key principle of governance – both physical access in the provision of Internet-enabled areas in built-up and countryside areas and in the provision of Internet accessible devices. That in turn introduces the concept of net neutrality – that the Internet access providers transmit all content on the web equally – and the right to view and disseminate content freely.

Governance will however only work with adequate security, not only to protect the information of individuals but also to prevent exposure to harmful and illegal content and behaviour. Security will only work if viewed holistically by all the Internet stakeholders – no one part can solve this problem.

The rapporteur rightly raises the question of artificial intelligence and what it has to offer, both as a risk and as an answer to these problems. We are still seeking effective solutions as it is hard to combat abuses without jeopardising the right to freedom of expression and information. This dilemma must be addressed.

I wish to draw attention to one area, which is the significance of local communities and groups who should be able to use the Internet to protect, develop and disseminate their local characteristics, be they cultural or linguistic. The Internet must not be a barrier to this or indeed be allowed to overwhelm cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies and dilute a culture, either by accident or by deliberate actions of governments.

The answer is complex but this report is to be welcomed. The answers will develop through international digital co-ordination, through multi-stakeholder engagement, the empowerment of Internet users, and transparency and accountable governance.

Mr John HOWELL (United Kingdom, EC, Spokesperson for the group): I, too, acknowledge the importance of this report. In fact, earlier this afternoon I sat down with Mr Martin WHITFIELD in an exercise in cross-party working and we agreed quite a lot of the contents of our contributions.

I agree that the Internet is a common good. It is difficult to see how society can function without an open, free and completely secure Internet. Like many, I use it to shift information and for general communications. Businesses use it as an essential part of trade. The extent to which we need regulation of the Internet is an open question. To some extent, we already have guidance on the use of the Internet which was started in 2005 by the United Nations.

The problem is not so much the Internet itself as the users of the Internet. This relates to content and behaviour online. The issue of behaviour takes us onto the ground that we have covered in other debates on the use of the Internet to host social media. I do not think the United Nations guidance sufficiently addresses the complexity of the problem. I agree that the task of getting the users to stand up on this is a difficult one. If we think of the number of users and their different needs, the task of getting them to agree on regulation is a hard one, although I too believe that it is essential that human rights should be at the heart of this.

The impact of technology also needs to be taken into account. This is a big part of the question about how the Internet can cope with future changes. I agree that the problems of dealing with the Internet are well understood: the difficulty is in getting solutions to those problems. That is a far more problematic issue to solve.

The report makes much of the need for a multi-stakeholder approach, and personally I agree with that. It is just that I think it will be a much more difficult task to arrange. If we think of all the stakeholders that are involved in putting material on the Internet, we can see the difficulties that that creates. Above all, we need to ensure that Internet users have absolute security.

I congratulate the rapporteur on producing this report and dealing with this thorny issue.

Mr František KOPŘIVA (Czech Republic, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): I am delighted by the draft resolution and the draft recommendation, because I believe this is the right and effective approach. Since the Internet is a worldwide web which is decentralised by its very nature, it makes sense to govern it on an international level. It is also vital to keep the balance between the responsibilities of users and online platform administrators. Hence, I think it is necessary to maintain a dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, as the resolution suggests.

Of course, key actors that tend to hold a monopoly have to sustain a fair and transparent environment and respect users' rights. Regarding human rights violations and crime on the Internet, it is imperative to ensure that online space is a safe place for everyone, while maintaining freedom of speech and facilitating creativity. The Internet of things is not a geek's dream; it is becoming a reality now. It is therefore essential to establish harmonised international security standards and promote open source-based technologies where possible, especially those funded from public budgets.

The Internet has simplified communication in an unprecedented way not only among people, but in interactions with bureaux. We need to provide access to the Internet for all citizens, uphold net neutrality and make the most use of open data. Most importantly, since the Internet became an integral part of state

administrations, we need to ensure that applications are sufficiently user-friendly for citizens and for the public servants using them. It is also crucial that specifications for these systems are implemented by impartial experts to ensure a high level of quality and prevent vendor lock-in. Then we can all fully benefit from the Internet.

In closing, I want to thank Mr Andres HERKEL for this well-balanced and reasonable draft resolution. I am going to proudly support it. Thank you for your attention.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR (Iceland, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): The Internet has progressed, evolved and conquered. It has gained a place and a role in everyday human life at a pace much quicker than the average state's capacity to monitor that evolution, and to channel it through laws and regulations that would effectively protect the public from the very same commodity it enjoys. The Internet evolved and developed capacities through which it infiltrated everyday activities much quicker than the official state was able to monitor these activities through laws and regulations.

Let us not forget that the Internet spawned as an emblematic accomplishment of a capitalist system that focused on its expansion and development, not its effective charting for legislative usage. Thus, the legislator was obliged to follow the leaps in the expansion and development of Internet use, more often quenching fires than preventing them. In that context, and given the climax of Internet infiltration of all aspects of the professional and personal life of people, enterprises and states, it is imperative that human rights are protected and pointed out. As we observed last month, when the United Nations General Assembly wrapped up its main session by passing a record number of resolutions relevant to internet policy. Those human rights-related resolutions led to positive developments, contributing to norms to safeguard privacy in the face of new threats, combat sexual harassment, and protect peaceful assembly and association both online and offline.

The Net neutrality issue points to that problem exactly, as it reveals that enterprising tycoons are able to regularise the content of the news, businesses and information we view on the Internet, regardless of our actual wishes and view. In the same area, the power gained by those who will be able to control that vast source of information is depicted in the debate about the personal data of the users, clients and viewers on the Internet. Internet governance must remain as much as possible an issue for dialogue platforms, such as the global United Nations Internet Governance Forum, the European Dialogue on Internet Governance and the South Eastern European dialogue on Internet Governance, as well as the various national initiatives that will focus on the human rights agenda and not the issues of a closed lobby of private companies that will decide based on profit and leverage.

Keeping in mind that the Internet has brought people together in a new age of equality that theoretically gives equal rights of access and expression, giving body to the "global village" notion, we must never abscond from our civic right and struggle to harness the hand of the free market for the benefit of the public and democracy.

Mr Nagif HAMZAYEV (Azerbaijan, FDG, Spokesperson for the group): First of all, I would like to mention that the report affirms the role of the Internet as "an indispensable tool for realising a range of human rights, combating inequality, and accelerating development and human progress". I certainly agree that there is enormous potential in the Internet for all aspects of human development: from economic and social, commerce and trade, finance, business, innovation, mobilisation and the attainment and exercise of freedoms. Since the Internet as a source of information is especially crucial in this context, we are heartened by Mr Andres HERKEL's call that "ensuring universal access... should be a priority for all of us".

Despite all the efforts that have been made so far, much remains to be done about the digital divide, state censorship and improved cyber-security capabilities at a national level. In the increasingly competitive and dynamic world we are living in today, Internet governance is key for the sake of people whose right is to be a part of it while preserving security. Today, one cannot understand the development of the world without electronic communication. People need to stay interconnected. They have the right to be a part of local, national and international levels of development. However, the articulation of international consensus and standards should be prioritised.

As we can witness in the report, there is still space for improvement in this huge and extremely important area of our lives. These essential recommendations are not, of course, the only concerns of the human rights community, but, if followed, they would clearly improve the climate for Internet governance in the world. Thank you for your attention.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The rapporteur will reply at the end of the debate, but does Mr Andres HERKEL wish to respond at this stage? That is not the case.

Mr Frédéric REISS (France, EPP/CD)*: I thank the rapporteur for his very detailed and interesting work on Internet governance – well done! This issue is at the heart of our democratic societies' concerns. The issue of control and sanctions linked to dereferencing is central. Experience shows that, despite the much publicised policies relating to self-regulation via fact-checkers and moderators, the digital giants are far from exemplary.

Several Council of Europe Member States, such as the Netherlands, have bodies responsible for controlling the content in the audiovisual sector, but often their powers need to be broadened so that they exercise the same degree of control over the digital environment. We came up against that difficulty during our discussions about the law on the manipulation of information in France. The Higher Audiovisual Council – the CSA – has become a meta-regulator of digital activity, but is not able to impose appropriate sanctions because those defined in 1986 for the classical audiovisual sector do not apply to the digital environment. I am convinced that digital governance makes sense only in the context of concerted European projects.

On personal data and Internet profiling by a number of non-European search engines, we must highlight initiatives such as Qwant – a Franco-German search engine that does not store private data. We cannot have Internet giants selling personal data to businesses and calling into question rights that are enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. European initiatives can better protect European citizens. The introduction of European rules on personal data represents real progress on Internet governance.

The issue of artificial intelligence and the use and possible abuse of algorithms is of central importance. Some citizens rightly feel at a loss when faced with the publication of personal data at important points in their lives. At the Internet Governance Forum in Paris, it was rightly said that human rights should be the same online and offline. Do citizens realise that? That issue is at stake as we shore up our democracies. Freedom of information, which we have just been discussing, is as important in the traditional media as it is on social media.

We must protect vulnerable groups – particularly children – from cyber-risks. The tools that the Council of Europe introduced in the context of its 5+5 programme, the Convention on Cybercrime and the fight against cyber-crime are essential. Internet governance is forcing us to think about new forms of co-operation. We must be proactive and innovative.

Mr Christophe LACROIX (Belgium, SOC)*: We cannot deny the importance of the Internet and its exponential development. The world is in constant flux. Artificial intelligence is omnipresent and has created new social, economic, legal and ethical challenges. I had the opportunity to start a debate in the Belgian Senate on the smart digital society, and we are about to complete our work.

It is urgent that Europe takes its place again in the digital world. When confronted with countries such as the United States and China, Europe must not let itself be digitally colonised by companies such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple. It is our responsibility to guarantee that democracy, freedom and users' fundamental rights are protected when they are confronted by those new technologies. That is something that I endorse in the draft resolution and recommendations.

Digital literacy is fundamental, but there is a lot still to do. Education starts with our youngsters, and we must train them to use the Internet. As the draft resolution says, they should know more about digital ethics and coding, and they should learn through play from an early age. We must train older members of our population to use the Internet so they are not affected by the digital gap; they should not be excluded in this changing world. I am sure that Europe can find its place. I encourage the adoption of the resolution and the recommendations, and I will definitely inform the Belgian Senate about all that has been said here.

Ms Sevinj FATALIYEVA (Azerbaijan, EC): It is impossible to discuss Internet governance and human rights without speaking about artificial intelligence, which comes to us through the Internet, and influences and governs people's lives. More and more people say that there are many risks associated with artificial intelligence. The rapid development of technology has led to the creation of extremely advanced algorithms much earlier than we expected. Day by day, technology is penetrating deeper into our lives and is becoming responsible for various processes operated by different applications.

We cannot deny that artificial intelligence makes life easier and simplifies many processes. Nevertheless, there are certain risks and threats associated with it. Fears have been raised about self-operated weapons systems that are programmed to kill, and the capacity of individuals or governments to manage autonomous military systems that do not care about people's lives. Neutralising such weapons after their deployment will be extremely difficult.

Social media, using autonomous algorithms, are very effective in the field of targeted marketing. They know who we are, what we like and the places we usually visit. Incredibly, they will understand what we think and will easily be able to change our opinions, giving us different points of view. Such algorithms and personal data collected through certain programmes can assist in presenting people with propaganda. Artificial intelligence will be able to control people's moods and attitudes, and manipulate them by presenting information in the most convincing format.

Online users' steps can be tracked and analysed, including the time at which they carry out their daily activities. Cameras are almost everywhere. Face-recognition algorithms that can easily identify us made us very happy when they were first created, but people are now starting to understand that, although they provide comfort, we are under surveillance all the time, and decisions are made based on that information. That is not only an invasion of privacy but the beginning of social oppression.

Today, companies compete for the most advanced technologies, but in that race they have forgotten about the threat of artificial intelligence. Governments must thoroughly investigate the dangers and risks of artificial intelligence. Only government regulation can restrain developers in their pursuit of ever-more advanced artificial intelligence.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): As Mr Robert TROY is not here, I call Mr Jenő MANNINGER.

Mr Jenő MANNINGER (Hungary, EPP/CD): The content of the report and the recommendations are acceptable. The report is an excellent summary of this highly important issue, so I support its adoption.

I will speak briefly about the situation in my country. The fundamental rights and freedoms mentioned in the document – the freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, the protection of children and women, and social inclusion – are guaranteed at the highest level of Hungarian national norms: the fundamental law of Hungary. It must therefore be the same in the world of the Internet.

In 2015, the Hungarian Government launched the digital welfare programme in order to facilitate the digitalisation of Hungary's society and economy. The main objective of the programme and its sectoral strategies is to help Hungarian citizens and enterprises to access digital tools and solutions, benefiting from the global digital transformation. We fully agree with the suggestion of the rapporteur, Mr Andres HERKEL, that a new, specific report should be prepared on artificial intelligence, given its timeliness and complexity.

On the multi-stakeholder approach mentioned in the report concerning Internet governance, Hungary recently established the Artificial Intelligence Coalition and the 5G Coalition, the main objective of which is to improve Hungary's competitiveness by connecting the public, private entities and universities and enhancing their co-operation in the field of digital transformation. We agree with recommendation 4, which expresses that the Council of Europe and the European Union should act together in this field.

The Internet penetrates ever more areas of human life. It is one of the most important means of not only ensuring human rights and democracy but of protecting the rights of citizens. There is a need not only to ensure the right to Internet access, without discrimination, but also to avoid these technologies becoming the means of manipulating opinions and imposing checks on our private lives.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC)*: I thank the rapporteur for the recommendation and the report, which comes at the perfect moment; it is particularly appropriate during the time of the Finnish presidency. The various new terminologies involved are new to me as well.

We live in a digital world. We have already seen specific problems coming to the fore, as well as that digital rift – that chasm – between cities and rural areas and between the young and the old. It is a double challenge. On the one hand is the issue of education and training in schools, and, on the other, lifelong learning to bridge the gap. There is now a new generation who will not ask what time the next meal is but whether wifi is available.

This discussion is very opportune. There are several different dangers, including the high level of hatred on the Internet, which has to be dealt with. We also have to protect against cyber-criminality and the mob roaming on the dark web. All these things require some form of protection against, particularly for children. Several serious responsibilities have to be taken into consideration. We have work to do on this front.

Digital ethics is a new concept in the digital world. It will be discussed during the Finnish presidency, and a high-level conference on the topic, and on whether artificial intelligence in the workplace is a friend or a foe, will take place in February, and there will be a further report on the dangers of algorithms, and the dictatorship of algorithms, by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media. We have discussed these issues and a recommendation has been issued to the Council of Ministers calling on the various Committees to deal with the ethics of matters concerning the Internet and its governance, working within the Committees framework and Europe-wide as well.

Ms Emine Nur GÜNAY (Turkey, EC): I thank the rapporteur for preparing this extensive report on Internet governance and human rights. The digital age has fundamentally changed the world, providing the world with knowledge, innovation, development, freedom and democracy. The Internet has eased access to information, which is a basic human right. It has also democratised the previously quite elite news cycle. People not only have access to information but are able to be the resource of information, mainly through social media and the blogosphere. We have seen the positive effect of information sharing in many recent societal movements.

By contrast, we have also seen social media and the web being very dangerous and harmful. The physical and mental integrity of individuals and societies are attacked daily, with ill-intentioned people and organisations inciting people to terrorism, hatred and extremism by spreading harmful propaganda and manipulating information. The youth, while being digitally proficient and keen to reap the benefits of the digital age, are particularly vulnerable on social media, in terms of being exposed to cyber-bullying, unattainable physical and social standards and sexual predators. The next generation will be defined by the digital world. Their world should not only be free and open but also safe, which means that both the public and private sectors should be active in filtering out harmful content.

It is vital to balance the safeguarding of freedom of expression and freedom of information on the virtual plane with the protection of individual rights and preventing the web from becoming a scary and hateful place. The public governance of content carries an insurmountable importance, and states have a vital task in protecting privacy and personal data and creating a free Internet to protect democracy and the rule of law in modern societies.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR)*: I thank the rapporteur and their colleagues. Originally a revolutionary process of communication for military use, the Internet has become much more than a new medium. More than 4 billion individuals, if we take the rapporteur's figures, and some 74% of the European Union's population between the ages of 16 and 74, are regular users. In 20 years, web applications have far transcended the mere framework of information and communication and have gradually spread to all fields of economic, cultural and civic life.

The daily growing importance of the Internet has inevitably had repercussions for human rights, which is becoming ever more important as practices on the web evolve and spread. The necessary preservation of freedom of expression and information should be first and foremost in our minds, and examples of censorship by states, operators or mercantile interests unfortunately remain too numerous. Like our rapporteur, I think that other fundamental rights, such as security, the protection of privacy and personal data, or even the very right to access the Internet, remain issues of major concern in a context of web governance that leaves much to be desired.

To my mind, the grounds for hope stem essentially from our continent. While the United States seems to be calling into question Net neutrality, the European Parliament and European Council regulation of 25 November 2015 enshrined the principle of guaranteeing access to an open Internet. We have also seen the entry into force of the general data protection regulation.

However, Internet governance cannot rest exclusively on rules adopted by states or groups of states. Indeed, the web is an ecosystem comprising an array of players extending well beyond states. The private sector – operators and content providers – and civil society and international organisations also have a role to play in developing standards and procedures.

From that standpoint, governance forums initiated at the global or European level are of particular interest. The last global Internet Governance Forum, held in Paris on 12 November, resulted in a call for trust and security in cyberspace. This was an initiative by President Emmanuel Macron that was signed by 51 States, 93 civil society stakeholders and 218 private sector partners. Moreover, a joint Facebook-French State working group was created to identify ways to combat hate speech on social networks more effectively. All this is movement in the right direction and could lead to much more robust results than unilaterally adopted standards. The resolution and recommendation before us today fit neatly with this drive, so I will support them unreservedly.

Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ (Turkey, NR): I thank the rapporteur for his good work on Internet governance and human rights. The Internet has become an indispensable and essential part of our lives over the years. It has fundamentally changed the way we communicate with each other. Our consumption of and trade in goods and services has begun to depend heavily on the Internet. More importantly, the Internet has become the main medium through which we access all sorts of information and express ourselves, especially via social media. On the other hand, the abuse of these freedoms creates a potential danger. Incitement to discrimination and terrorism, hatred and violence against religious and ethnic minorities, and violence against women are among the serious breaches of these freedoms on the Internet.

In the face of these challenges, Internet governance is a complicated and delicate concept. First, we need to develop a balanced approach between security and the enjoyment of freedoms in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. Secondly, Internet governance should be subject to open national and international co-operation, reflecting the Internet's transborder nature and the range of actors involved. The Internet's transborder nature means that it encompasses nations, states and people regardless of borders or obstacles, and various actors, such as governments, the private sector and users, operate within the Internet.

The growth of Internet use has created new challenges, especially with regard to the enjoyment of human rights. The right to freedom of expression and information, one of the central pillars of European human rights law, has become the centre of attention. State censorship and restrictions on content due to the interests of operators are among the challenges to these freedoms. It is essential to safeguard freedom of expression and the right to access all content of the Internet. I believe that the Council of Europe is a key institution for human rights-based and multi-actor Internet governance.

Mr Ahmet Ünal ÇEVİKÖZ (Turkey, SOC): The Internet and social media play an important role in our everyday life and are becoming the dominant governing forces affecting our activities. Certainly, such an environment presents serious challenges, as several members have mentioned. Possible abuses of the right to freedom of expression and information on the Internet include the resorting to narratives of hatred and violence, child abuse, manipulation of information and propaganda, as well as incitement to terrorist activities.

In Turkey, there are two major problems with Internet use. The first is when Internet media are blamed for defamation and insult. The second is the frequent implementation of Internet bans. In Turkey, many journalists are imprisoned, mostly for allegedly being terrorists, but there are other pretexts to blame journalists. For instance, Turkey is the only country where a journalist reporting on the Paradise Papers has been sentenced to imprisonment after being convicted of defamation and insult.

Prosecutions under article 299 of the Turkish penal code for insulting the president are immediately approved by the Minister of Justice and can carry a sentence of one to four years' imprisonment. The number of such cases has increased dramatically, from 132 in 2014 to more than 6 000 in 2017. The use of article 299 of the Turkish penal code to prosecute journalists, academics and other citizens from different walks of life because of their social media postings has become a permanent feature in Turkey in the last couple of years. This is a direct assault on freedom of expression.

Turkey is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and is legally bound under both international legal instruments to respect freedom of expression. The European Court of Human Rights has made it clear that any efforts to protect a head of state "cannot justify conferring on him or her a privilege or special protection vis-à-vis the right to express opinions about him or her." Unfortunately, this legal commitment on the part of Turkey is grossly violated by current practice.

The Internet is also an open ecosystem, and in a pluralistic society this ecosystem has to exist hand in hand with access to knowledge and freedom of expression. However, the Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia is banned in Turkey. This is yet another limitation on free access to knowledge and, in this case, an objective source of information. I hope this report and the draft resolution will become a major guideline for many to show greater respect for freedom of expression and freedom of access to knowledge and sources of information.

Mr Martin HEBNER (Germany, NR)*: The draft before us looks very promising indeed. We talk in paragraph 5 of the resolution about freedom of opinion and freedom of information, both of which are very necessary, while in paragraph 6 we talk about protection against abuse of the Internet. I think we all realise that we need protection against malware, and we need a ban on the use of child pornography – I think we would all agree that these things need to be criminalised – but what about hate speech? Where is there a clear definition of what constitutes hate speech? How can we protect sections of the public against it? What, too, about abuse of the right to freely relay information? What protections are governments expected to offer when it comes to uploader filters or the blocking of certain sites?

We are dealing with a tension or conflict between, on the one hand, the freedom of citizens to access the most precious commodity in society and, on the other, the need to protect citizens from all forms of abuse, in terms of government supervision and controls. However, I do not think the report deals with this tension. On the contrary, it says that all the interests of stakeholders need to be brought around the same table. As an appeal, it does not go far enough, because we have not defined a number of concepts. In fact, one might say that these are empty words.

There is nothing in the recommendation on the subject of freedom; there is just talk of control and further efforts on supervision and governance of the Internet. It talks about control and supervision with no clarity brought to the concepts we are using or what we seek to protect. As far as the recommendation is concerned, it is a blank cheque given to governments to decide what should be done about, for example, upload filters – a very controversial topic.

In short, we are talking about media literacy but also about protecting citizens against themselves. For all parties that uphold freedom, that is unacceptable.

Mr Sos AVETISYAN (Armenia, NR): I, too, thank Mr Andres HERKEL for his meticulous work on this report, which tackles almost all aspects of the complex relationship between governance of the Internet and human rights. The Internet is seen in the report as a public good. However, it is a neutral one – a neutral ecosystem informed by its own users.

In April 2018, the Internet was instrumental in mobilising the Armenian people and bringing about democratic change peacefully. This was noted in Freedom House's 2019 "Freedom on the Net" report, in which Armenia's status improved from "partly free" to "free". We cherish this public space, where the citizenry may freely discuss and share ideas and hold the government accountable for its reforms without fear of the persecution practised elsewhere in the world.

Internet governance should focus only on expanding the network to other people in the country to ensure that everyone has access to the Internet. Regulation on behalf of the state should be very limited. States should work with their own populations through education and media literacy to improve the public's resilience to propaganda and anti-democratic statements. We should be careful when we talk about the interlinkage between the Internet and human rights. I understand that a public space can be poisoned by hate speech, propaganda and disinformation, but tackling this issue requires media transparency, addressing ownership issues and critical thinking, which we should work on in the education system. It is not always on the Internet that we need to find solutions, but rather in the broader public space that surrounds it.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): That concludes the list of speakers. I call our rapporteur, Mr Andres HERKEL, to sum up. You have four minutes.

Mr Andres HERKEL (Estonia, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): I thank everybody who participated in the discussion and elaborated on many topics I touched on only superficially in my introduction. As I mentioned, there are many aspects to this and it is a topic of the future. As I said, artificial intelligence, social media and personal

data deserve separate reports, and the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has many reports in the pipeline on similar topics. Today's discussion of the media was also partly about new challenges and what is happening to the Internet.

The monitoring mechanisms of the Parliamentary Assembly and the observation of elections are also very important. In this regard, what is happening to the Internet is even more important. Many aspects touch on our everyday work. Cyber-security, the prevention of cyber-attacks and monitoring, also mentioned in the recommendation, are extremely important. Our big infrastructures are vulnerable, as are our democratic institutions. There are very different threats.

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR mentioned the regional European Dialogue on Internet Governance, or EuroDIG. If we want better or clearer procedures for Internet governance, the Council of Europe, as well as the European Union, could give more political weight to that organisation.

I say to Mr Martin HEBNER that, yes, it is impossible to define the terms I use in paragraphs 5 and 6. They are, however, apparently defined in lots of other documents that form the basis of our work here in the Council of Europe.

My last duty is to thank the secretariat, especially the gentleman sitting behind me, Mr Piero FASSINO, for all its work and assistance in the preparation of the report.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Herkel. I now call the vice-chairperson of the committee, Lord George FOULKES. You have two minutes.

Lord George FOULKES (United Kingdom, SOC): The report was adopted unanimously and enthusiastically by the committee. I draw the Assembly's attention particularly to draft recommendations 2, 3 and 4, the first of which states: "Internet governance should continue to be given high priority". Recommendation 3 goes on to say that, "additional efforts should be made to promote enhanced internet governance and help Council of Europe Member States to act together to take up the challenges". Recommendation 4 states: "At European level, the Council of Europe and the European Union should act together to this end". If we can work together with the European Union, that would be really helpful.

I thank Mr Andres HERKEL for his report. He has worked on this assiduously and has produced an excellent report, which was, as I say, adopted unanimously and enthusiastically by the committee. I hope the Assembly will also adopt it enthusiastically and unanimously.

Vote: Internet governance and human rights

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): The debate is closed.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft resolution, to which no amendments have been tabled. We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 14789.

The vote is open.

The draft resolution in Document 14789 is adopted, with 60 votes for, 3 against and 2 abstentions.

The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media has presented a draft recommendation, to which no amendments have been tabled. We will now proceed to vote on the draft recommendation contained in Document 14789.

The vote is open.

The draft recommendation in Document 14789 is adopted, with 68 votes for, 1 against and 3 abstentions.

Debate: Discrimination in access to employment / For a disability-inclusive workforce

Ms Carmen LEYTE (Spain, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): We now come to the joint debate on two reports from the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. The first is entitled "Discrimination in access to employment" (Document 14666) presented by Mr Damien THIÉRY, and the second is entitled "For a disability-inclusive workforce" (Document 14665) presented by Mr Adão SILVA.

I will interrupt the list of speakers at about 7.35 p.m. to allow for the replies and the votes.

I remind members that speaking time in this debate will be limited to three minutes. I call Mr Damien THIÉRY, rapporteur, to present the first report. You have 13 minutes in total, which you may divide between presentation of the report and reply to the debate.

Mr Damien THIÉRY (Belgium, ALDE, Rapporteur)*: Thank you, Madam President. Distinguished colleagues, you are probably aware that the right to work is one of our fundamental rights and access to the labour market is a powerful factor for integration. What we see instead, however, is more exclusion and people being stuck in a vicious cycle of isolation, which leads in turn to poverty. Discrimination in access to work remains very much in the lives of people in our Member States, whatever the reason for that discrimination. Discrimination may occur on the basis of someone's ethnic origin; religion – their supposed or actual religion; age; social origin; or physical type. It may also occur for other reasons. We must underline our respect for this right and for the principle of non-discrimination in the world of work.

The Parliamentary Assembly has often made recommendations to the Member States on, for example, the importance of making access to the labour market available for different sorts of people. We are dealing with the employment situation for older people, younger people, refugees, Roma and Travellers, and people with disabilities, and with the importance of making women independent. Issues in these areas have all been part of the problem. Various measures have been suggested, such as investing in different programmes and targeting different parts of the population where there is a particular problem of unemployment.

One other aspect, which has often been neglected in the Assembly, is the need also to adopt measures to overcome prejudice in the attitude of employers. I worked in a multinational for 20 years before I entered politics – I am probably not typical among members of the Parliamentary Assembly in that respect. When I worked there, I was very much involved in hiring people, particularly for sales roles. The great temptation was to imagine an archetype of someone who was a sort of Platonic ideal of what we wanted: our ideal staff member to represent the company. We came up against the fact of people's differences, qualities and faults, and the origin of the candidates, and we found that in fact this diversity created the effectiveness of the teams of which I was in charge. Back then, we thought in terms of those kinds of ideals. In the light of that, I would like you to take a serious look at this report. If our employers are not more inclusive and they are not open to diversity, the candidates of whom we are speaking will never benefit from the various policies – sometimes very expensive ones for the country – established by governments. It is therefore important that employers should be at the heart of this.

As I said, various general measures can be taken to make sure that those who do not have a job can have access on an equal footing – I stress that point – to the labour market. We must also make sure that our anti-discrimination laws are complete, covering discrimination on all grounds. That is another important issue covered in the report. We must provide legal remedies for people who are victims of discrimination in access to employment. We must also adopt an integrated policy designed to promote access to employment for disadvantaged groups in this area. States must make sure that they tackle discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in employers.

We also highlight the reality of discrimination and what can be done about it. The idea was to make sure that we study what is happening in the various Member States. For example, we looked at the position in the United Kingdom for ethnic minority women and Muslim women. Of course, we looked at the private sector in particular, but in the Netherlands and in Spain we saw that there is also a problem in the public sector. In France, a large number of posts in the public sector require people to pass an entrance exam. People who are not born in France itself, and those who come from the suburbs, have a lot less likelihood of doing well in that written exam to enter the public service. States must take general measures to ensure that discriminated

against groups are not subjected to such treatment, while also ensuring that any discrimination in the private sector is dealt with. We must also address the fact that artificial intelligence can be used; algorithms can be used in both big and medium-sized enterprises when human resources departments are hiring.

We wanted to be pragmatic in our approach. We want to see the use of direct methods, such as having anonymous CVs and filtering them in an anonymous way, and indirect ones, such as financial support for people looking for work, as happens in the United Kingdom, and legal measures. We need to support the initiatives in public and private enterprises to promote diversity within themselves and provide a positive message. Positive messages about diversity within society and within companies and enterprises are particularly important.

Of course, that can only be achieved if employers actively support diversity. We appreciate a German initiative called the Diversity Charter, which was launched in 2006, when four big countries participated. Now, more than 3 000 German companies are part of that programme to promote diversity within themselves. Fifteen other European countries have also established that sort of system, which is a huge advance.

Those are the main points that I wanted to make. We will pay close attention to what everyone has to say.

Ms Carmen LEYTE (Spain, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you Mister Thiéry. You have four minutes 20 seconds remaining.

I call Mr Adão SILVA, rapporteur, to present the second report. You have 13 minutes in total, which you may divide between presentation of the report and reply to the debate.

Mr Adão SILVA (Portugal, EPP/CD, Rapporteur)*: I am delighted to be with you in this afternoon's plenary sitting to present my report, "For a disability-inclusive workforce". Throughout Europe, people with disabilities face a whole series of obstacles if they wish to find work. Those obstacles are due to accessibility problems, over and above a certain reluctance on the part of potential employers to hire them. Generally speaking, the odds are stacked against people with a disability who are looking for work. Employment rates among people with disabilities are low and they find it hard to find well-paid jobs.

In my report, I have tried to analyse the reasons that underpin that phenomenon and come forward with proposals. Promoting an active lifestyle and work life for people with disabilities is important to help to reduce discrimination against disabled people. Obviously we did not have time to provide a detailed analysis of every Council of Europe Member State, so I looked at a series of countries with different approaches with a view to finding information on protected work, quotas and the implementation of non-discrimination legislation.

I spoke to many people with disabilities who told me about the difficulties they face when looking for work or when they are actually in a job. I drafted the report with the motto "Nothing about us without us" in mind. I listened carefully to disabled people who feel that they have been rejected and pushed aside by the labour market. Our group organised two hearings in 2018, which people with disabilities were invited to attend.

We also had other guests, including human resources experts and experts in a wide range of different aspects of the problem. At the end of last year, I went to Denmark, where I had the opportunity to see at first hand some of the measures in place there to encourage employers to take on people with disabilities. I take the opportunity to thank members of the sub-committee, as well as members of the full committee, for their contribution and support of the work.

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets out a duty on the States parties to recognise the rights of people with disabilities to work on an equal footing with others. That includes mandatory measures to create an environment favourable to the employment of people with disabilities in the public and private sectors. That convention, which has been ratified by many countries, must now be implemented. We have to remember the founding principle of the treaty – the inclusion of people with a disability – and move towards its completion.

We cannot talk about integration in the employment market while we do not have full integration in schools and universities. Fully inclusive education is the first and most vital step towards the full integration of people with disabilities in the labour market. A single measure would not be enough; we need measures that recognise the different nature of different types of disability.

The purpose of my report is to try to break the mould when it comes to the way that people think about access to the labour market for disabled people, which is a benefit not just for the people themselves but for the company or public body they work for. We have to send a clear message to the people we serve. An inclusive approach encourages tolerance and respect, and can be a source of hope and strength to young people with handicaps who have not yet found a job.

It is time to bring an end to the myth that people with disabilities cannot work properly. We need to promote awareness in the general public about the need to help people with disabilities to find work. We have to change society's attitude to people with disabilities, but that will be possible only if more people with disabilities are visible in high-ranking jobs for the state and the authorities, in private companies, in universities and so on.

We also have to overcome a whole series of prejudices regarding the type of jobs that are suitable for people with disabilities. Although not all jobs are suitable for people with disabilities, very many can be done by them, provided that specific measures and adaptations are taken. New technology that provides assistance for people with disabilities has developed enormously in recent years and enables people with disabilities to access new professions. Their disability must be recognised and catered for so as to ensure that everything possible is done to make it easier for them to work.

We must strive to improve places of work and work posts for people with disabilities, and ensure that public buildings and public transport are made accessible. In my report, I talk about an enlightening visit that we undertook to the centre for disabled people in Taastrup, Denmark, where everything is available in braille, the meeting chairs are adapted for people with different types of disabilities, the lighting is suitable for people with impaired vision, and the height of the desks is adjustable. We should use that as a model when we build new buildings and renovate existing buildings.

Changes to workplaces do not just involve changes to the material working conditions. A reasonable level of change will involve changes to equipment, as well as changes to job descriptions, working hours, the organisation of work and the working area. Existing colleagues might also sometimes need support to prepare for the inclusion of a person with a handicap in the team. We have to ensure that the workplace is welcoming for people with disabilities, which involves a culture change that can sometimes take time.

Financial investments are also necessary to ensure that full support is extended to disabled people who seek to enter the job market. Once a person with a disability has been given a job, follow-up must be provided. Human resources departments with specialists in coaching, and individual projects designed to enhance the employability of people with disabilities, can improve the efficiency of companies and act as a powerful example. In Spain, the organisation Inserta provides support for unemployed people with disabilities by helping them to improve their qualifications and profile and by identifying the type of jobs they are suitable for.

Sadly, however, although the law provides for sanctions and penalties to be given to employers who do not respect quotas, some employers would rather pay a fine than hire a person with a disability. I come forward with a whole series of recommendations in my report, which I hope you will support when voting on the resolution. I count on your support to highlight your political determination to ensure that the integration of people with disabilities in the labour market becomes a reality. We have to support the vision of a society in which each and every one of us has a place.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in the debate on this important matter this evening

Ms Carmen LEYTE (Spain, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. You have three minutes and 30 seconds remaining.

Ms Petra BAYR (Austria, SOC, Spokesperson for the group)*: The two resolutions before us today depict a kind of labour that is paid and is very much controlled. I thank both rapporteurs for their work, but of course the meaning is not the same for people who are born into families without massive inheritances and with no incomes. In the worst possible cases, these people can be exploited and used in unsafe environments; sometimes it can even be lethal. It is very difficult for them to enjoy teamwork or creativity, because that depends on what type of labour it is.

Work is an extremely important part of most people's lives, but a lot of people are denied that experience. There are a lot of people, including disabled people and women, who keep applying for jobs and are turned away again and again; they are told, "There is no place for you in our world of work." There are also people who are discriminated against once they do have a job – for example, they are never given a position of

responsibility and are paid less than others. However many reasons there might be for such discrimination, it is generally completely unjustified and not well founded. For example, as an Austrian woman, I will be earning an average of 38% less than an Austrian man, and 14% of that is nothing to do with my level of education, experience or seniority in the company; 14% can only be explained by the fact that I happen to be a woman. That is no reason for someone to earn less. Education and training of disabled people is also neglected. Disabled people can be highly motivated and very hard-working, but they are not taken seriously because of prejudices against them. Even having an exotic name can be a massive hurdle to getting a job.

The Socialists, Democrats and Greens group denounces all such discrimination and feels that there has to be a legal framework to protect people against it. We will be rejecting all the amendments to the reports because they undermine the idea of inclusion and the idea that access to human rights should be non-discriminatory. We can only achieve that through obligatory measures, not through any kind of voluntary, wishy-washy plans. That is what we have been elected to ensure as members of parliament, so we will be commending these two resolutions as they now stand, without amendment.

Mr Mikayel MELKUMYAN (Armenia, EC, Spokesperson for the group)*: I thank the two rapporteurs, Mr Damien THIÉRY and Mr Adão SILVA, for their excellent presentations.

The subject at hand is very important, but we should strive to find practical solutions that deliver results, rather than theoretical ones. It is important to remember that our fellow citizens – people with disabilities – are not a problem just in certain states. The problems that they face are across the board, in all countries across the whole world. We have to ensure that each country does its utmost to try to solve the problems of inclusion for people with disabilities.

Let me turn to the official statistics for the various Member States. Invalidity rates start at 6% or 7%, and go right up to 14% or 15% in certain countries. Those figures depend on the statistical methods used to evaluate invalidity. However, we have seen a major increase in migration over the last ten years, and this is very negative. The time has come to put forward new ideas to address this issue. We need a social compromise between citizens, society, governments and businesses. Every business must know why they are paying tax and what the government is doing to lay the groundwork to ensure that businesses – particularly small and medium-sized ones – can take on people with disabilities. Governments should use a system similar to the generalised scheme of preferences plus – that is, tax breaks to encourage an inclusive approach to employing people with disabilities. Companies that achieve those targets should be supported. The whole European Conservatives Group will be supporting the amendments, and I commend them to members.

Mr Goran BEUS RICHEMBERGH (Croatia, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): I thank the rapporteurs for their excellent job and efforts in preparing these two draft resolutions and reports.

Europe is faced with serious changes and challenges for the labour market, which have many different causes, from social and economic circumstances to the effects of migration. These issues affect whole sectors, industries and national economies. Some Member States are still facing a high rate of unemployment, while others face a serious lack of labour force. We have also witnessed a large amount of migration from eastern and southern European Union States to western and northern ones. But the impacts of migration should not be a cover for tolerating discrimination in access to employment. On the contrary, it has to be the triggering moment for the liberalisation of access to jobs in order to reduce prejudice, to combat the obstacles that still exist for deprived citizens and to implement related conventions, as Mr Adão SILVA said.

There should be no excuse for discrimination based on gender, religion, race, ethnicity, age, lifestyle, disability or any other origin, affiliation or physical ability. States are responsible for ensuring equal chances and transparent access for all social groups, as well as the protection of their human rights. As Mr Damien THIÉRY stressed in his report, the right to work is a fundamental right. Mr Adão SILVA underlined in his report that all Council of Europe Member States should establish inclusive employment policies. Therefore, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe is supporting the reports and the related recommendations. Please vote in favour of them.

Ms Miren GORROTXATEGI (Spain, UEL, Spokesperson for the group)*: The right to work is a human right that is recognised in our constitutions, for those countries with constitutions. It is also recognised as a right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a right because it is a pre-condition for people being able to enjoy their rights. It is a condition for social interaction and participation. It is a right that underpins individual citizens' dignity.

However, despite the fact that it is a recognised human right, in many cases it is not properly enforced. This right should set a yardstick that should enable politicians to measure their efforts to ensure that people can find work. The fact that this right does not work properly as such, but is more of a vague objective, means that it is all the more vulnerable to the vagaries of economic policies that undermine this right. In some cases, the right disappears and people find themselves unable to enjoy their right to the dignity that a job brings with it. If someone is unemployed, they are not able to exercise this right.

Unemployment is an inevitable side-effect of our socio-economic system. However, certain sectors of society are more vulnerable than others, and for those people the need to find a job is even more important. This is particularly the case when it comes to enabling people to exercise the fundamental human right of the right to work. People with a disability are particularly vulnerable and they are simply being refused their rights. People with a disability are, as has been proved, more vulnerable in employment situations despite the fact that the disadvantage they are at is not due to their inability to do the job.

Moreover, research has been done that demonstrates that in many cases people with a disability are actually best equipped. Those who have suffered most discrimination are often head and shoulders above the rest. The fact is that the type of disability does not seem to influence people's risk of being unemployed. In other words, we are talking about a cause of discrimination that leads to people's fundamental right to work being denied. This phenomenon has to be fought with the utmost strength that we can muster, and I congratulate both rapporteurs on the excellent job they have done on these reports.

Mr Killion MUNYAMA (Poland, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): I congratulate Mr Damien THIÉRY and Mr Adão SILVA on the excellent job that they have done in preparing the two reports.

Let me start with the report by Mr Damien THIÉRY. It is crucial to observe the principle of equal treatment in access to and use of labour market services and instruments, irrespective of race, sex, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Discrimination in access to employment lays the foundation for radicalism among different social groups. Those who feel discriminated against start feeling unwanted in society, and start looking for justice based on their own definition of it. It could be true for the minority in a society, including the children of migrants. Such treatment is unacceptable and could lead to dangerous behaviour.

According to the Diversity Charter, which is an instrument and a written commitment that is voluntarily adopted by companies and institutions in the European Union, organisations commit to the introduction of equal treatment policies and diversity management, as well as active prevention of discrimination and bullying in the workplace. It is an international initiative supported by the European Commission, and implemented so far in 21 European Member States – not 15, as the rapporteur suggested. It should be a good example for all Member States of the Council of Europe.

The EPP supports the recommendations in the report and believes that employees should be treated equally in terms of establishing and terminating employment relationships.

In Mr Adão SILVA's report, it is essential to underline that Member States should commit to making the inclusion of people with disabilities a priority for adopting comprehensive national disability plans. We will vote in favour of both reports and reject the amendments that would weaken their content.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR, President of the Assembly)*: The rapporteurs will reply at the end of the debate, but does Mr Damien THIÉRY wish to respond at this stage?

No, he does not.

We will continue with the list of speakers.

Mr Vernon COAKER (United Kingdom, SOC): I too congratulate the two colleagues who introduced these important reports. I was shocked when I did some research around the reports to see the context in which we are discussing them today. All of us would wish to be inclusive, but if we look across Europe, we see that disability hate crime is rising. We see that there is still significant stereotyping of people with physical and mental disabilities.

The reports are welcome in that they seek to challenge those stereotypes and the way in which some of our fellow citizens are viewed. We should say that we do not accept those stereotypes. We should say that all individuals are, as Mr Killion MUNYAMA has said, of equal worth, whatever their background, problems or issues. I want also to draw attention to the discrimination that people with mental health problems face. Often when we see someone with a physical disability it is obvious that they need support. We all know, sometimes from our own families and communities, that people with mental health problems find it difficult to be treated in a non-discriminatory way, in education or in the workplace. We have a long way to go to overcome the discrimination that many people feel as a result of their mental health issues. Indeed, such is the issue that many people find it very difficult to say that they have a problem with their mental health and to seek help and support for it. These are important matters that need to be looked at in the context of the reports.

If I might make one other plea from my own background as an education professional – as a teacher – the report talks about the inclusion of young people in schools. I am particularly concerned about the inclusion of and support for young people who are excluded from school not because they have a mental health or learning difficulty, or because they have a physical disability, but because they find it very difficult to cope in a school environment – those who are anti-social or indeed verging on the criminal. They are often excluded from schools with very little provision. We need to ensure that we support them too, rather than just casting them into a twilight world where nobody is quite sure what is happening to them while they are out of school but not in a proper, supported environment.

Ms Maura HOPKINS (Ireland, EPP/CD): Like other speakers, I want to strongly compliment the rapporteurs for their work on these issues and, most importantly, for putting them to the fore. It is great to see them on the agenda on this occasion.

I come from a healthcare background. I am of the strong opinion, as are we all, that a disability should not dictate the path a person is able to take in life. What absolutely should count are a person's abilities, talents, strengths, and determination to succeed and to participate fully in society. Earlier this year, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by the Irish Parliament. The Irish delegates to the Council of Europe, including myself, are very satisfied about that. However, much work remains to be done to create an equal society for people with disabilities both in Ireland and right across Europe. We know – the rapporteurs clearly state it – that educational attainment among people with disabilities is lower and that participation in the workforce is much lower than among the general population.

I would like to set out an important strategy, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, which has been developed in Ireland. It is a 10-year strategy. As previous speakers have said, our emphasis needs to be on putting practical measures in place to support people. I will mention six of the strategy's priorities within the context of this debate: supporting people with disabilities in the area of building skills – building capacity, building independence – with education very much being the first step; providing support into work, both perhaps from a transport point of view or an assistive technology point of view; making work pay; promoting job retention, which is crucial; providing co-ordinated and ongoing support; and engaging with employers. Those are six very practical measures that can be very useful in trying to encourage further participation in the workforce.

We know there are many similarities – although every person is an individual – in the challenges people with disabilities face in the work force. That is very evident in both reports presented this evening. From an Irish perspective, we very much want to rise to the challenge. We should very much take on board the vision set out in both reports.

Ms Serap YAŞAR (Turkey, EC)*: Distinguished colleagues, may I start by wishing you a happy new year and by thanking the rapporteurs, Mr Damien THIÉRY and Mr Adão SILVA, for their very significant reports?

The principle of equal treatment on the right to work is based on a basic principle of justice – the most important concept in natural law – which has been enshrined in constitutions and in the text of our laws. The principle of equality of treatment is a part of the national labour laws of many countries which ban discrimination on the basis of language, race, gender, handicap, politics, philosophical convictions, religious denomination and other reasons. As with national legislation, a large number of international instruments also ban discrimination.

Theoretically speaking the rules are there, but in practice discrimination, particularly discrimination based on gender, ethnic, religious and other grounds, is very much in evidence. It is a matter of great regret that a nationalist wave is growing in Europe, with the rise of racism and Islamophobic attitudes leading to increased

discrimination when it comes to getting a job. When I was a lawyer, I received complaints from a large number of women who had been refused a job because of their clothes when they were interviewed. There really were significant numbers of such people. The right to work is one of our most fundamental rights and it is our job to make sure that every citizen should have fair and equal access to that right.

On the contents of the reports, I consider that the moment chosen for this subject is very pertinent, given the rise of racism. I once again congratulate my colleagues on their reports.

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE (Turkey, SOC): Both reports are very timely and I congratulate both rapporteurs.

Pick any economic indicator and you are certain to observe huge inequalities. On wealth, for example, the recently published annual Oxfam international report notes that the combined fortune of the world's 26 richest individuals is equal to the total wealth of the 3.8 billion poorest people. Pick unemployment. Historically, women have been more affected by unemployment than men. Youth unemployment is much higher than overall unemployment. Although at different extents, both phenomena apply across all countries.

That is reflected in the anecdotal evidence detailed in the reports. They both say that the global economic system discriminates based on identity and disability. If we are to eradicate such discrimination and inequality, we need to find their root cause. First, it is clear that identity-based polarising politics has a pertinent role in identity-based economic discrimination. Secondly, those inequalities are a natural result of the current global economic system.

Neoliberalism deliberately chose to shrink the welfare state, reduce unionisation and bless the markets with full power with almost no checks and balances. It reduced the power of the people. That meant that disadvantaged groups were bound to remain so. As such, the task of eradicating discrimination and resulting inequalities has to start with the micro-level targeted policies articulated in the reports. However, we have to complement them with a strong macro framework that changes our economic policymaking.

We need to ensure that we have inclusive institutions. We need to find a way to overcome polarising, identity-driven populist politics. We need to continuously remind the wider public that their jobs are threatened not by the vilified "others", but rather by a global economic system that continuously favours large firms over small and medium-sized enterprises, large firms over workers, and the 1% over the 99%. The priorities of economic decision making have to change towards ones that prioritise equity, inclusivity, and emphasise a strong welfare state and a strong democracy. In short, we need to change the nature of our economic system.

Mr Jaime GONZÁLEZ TABOADA (Spain, EPP/CD)*: Like the previous speakers, I thank the rapporteurs for their excellent work. We sorely needed this debate in this session. There are more than 500 million people around the world with some kind of disability. Many have a job and are integrated into society, but we must fight to ensure that disabled people, who have suffered so much, enjoy full employment. Companies must respect the principle of non-discrimination and promote professional qualifications and experience. We must encourage vocational training and the promotion of work for disabled people to ensure that all young people can get a first job. I am also worried about sexual harassment at work.

Disability should never be a barrier to finding work, but it has a serious effect on people's ability to work. Spain plans to introduce legislation to outlaw violence and sexually oriented behaviour in the workplace. The right to work is a fundamental right in the European Union. In the European Union, we should not allow any form of discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or religion. People with disabilities – or, should I say, with different abilities – should be given the same opportunities as all of us when it comes to finding a first job. Those jobs should be high-quality and sustainable. We should not get caught up in legal principles; we must go beyond that. We all have an obligation to fight for genuine equality.

Employment discrimination means that some people are placed in situations of discrimination or exclusion. Just last week, I saw a job advert that stated that the job was just for men. Talent and equal opportunities should be the buzzwords of the future for the labour market. We must achieve fairness and justice in this area.

In Spain, under the former Prime Minister Rajoy, a series of measures were introduced to combat labour market exclusion. I wish the current government would do the same. People with disabilities – particularly young people – must be able to enjoy the improvements that have come about in the labour market. Things are better than they were for our fathers and grandfathers.

Once again, I thank the rapporteurs for their excellent work, which will help us ensure that people with disabilities enjoy equality and can find a job.

Ms Ann-Britt ÅSEBOL (Sweden, EPP/CD): It is extremely important that disabled persons have access to the labour market. To have work and to be in a social environment makes us feel that we are needed, and makes us feel good and self-confident. Unfortunately, the labour market is full of obstacles for disabled persons – when I talk about disabled persons, I mean people with physical or mental disabilities.

I will give a couple of examples from my home country, Sweden. According to the Swedish Public Employment Service, the number of people under the age of 30 with a mental disability is increasing, and international studies show that the same is true in other countries. It is therefore important that we have a strategy for matching those people to the labour market, and work goals.

We have special support to make the workplace accessible, including personal assistants who are paid by the Swedish Public Employment Service, where we have special employees who just work with disabled persons. Disabled persons go out to different employers and work according to the supported employment method, which is a form of employment in which they receive wages and benefits from the employer in a competitive workplace. It is a win-win situation. It means more diversity in an inclusive environment and new knowledge for the employers. The statistics show that it has been very successful and cost-effective.

We have a long way to go before we get all disabled persons into the labour market. I welcome these reports, because it is important that we include all people in our society. Thank you very much for them. I call for the implementation of the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Ms Sahiba GAFAROVA (Azerbaijan, EC): I congratulate my colleagues, Mr Damien THIÉRY and Mr Adão SILVA, on their reports and their work on this very important issue. As was mentioned, more than 2 billion worldwide suffer problems relating to disability. In addition to difficulties relating to their physical health, integration into society and their finances, one of the most crucial challenges for people in this category is unemployment. I believe that every society that aims to protect people with disabilities should be interested in their involvement in the labour market.

In his report, Mr Adão SILVA mentioned the experience of several countries, and I want briefly to give some information about my country. Azerbaijan does not leave people with disabilities alone. Instead, it proactively implements measures to integrate them into society. Today in Azerbaijan, there are approximately 620 000 disabled people, including 70 000 children with disabilities and 50 000 people who became disabled during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The state pays serious attention to overcoming those people's social problems, and has introduced effective measures to do that.

Provisions relating to persons with disabilities have been included in the national action plan on the protection of human rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the national action programme for action to raise the effectiveness of the protection of human rights and freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan, both of which have been approved by presidential decree. A number of activities are carried out under those programmes, such as healthcare and the medical rehabilitation of disabled persons; the ensuring of conditions for their rehabilitation in foreign countries; the improvement of the specialised medical services rendered to chronic patients; and the provision of methods of technical rehabilitation and transportation. Those activities are all funded from the state budget.

In addition, the ombudsman's office has been co-operating with the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Labour and the Social Protection of the Population is doing a lot, including providing wheelchairs for disabled children and free diagnosis and medication for those who have diabetes and other illnesses.

Azerbaijan has also taken steps to implement inclusive education. In 2001, the law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the education of persons with disabilities was adopted. Furthermore, the Cabinet of Ministers has adopted nine decrees to implement the law, and the government has adopted the state programme on the organisation of the educational programme for children with special needs and medical conditions. The programme has been implemented in co-operation with international organisations through several inclusive educational projects, and has been applied in 30 educational organisations.

Mr Momodou Malcolm JALLOW (Sweden, UEL): I thank the authors of this timely and important report. As it emphasises, the right to work is a fundamental right that is guaranteed by international instruments and charters. The right for every individual to make use of their abilities and contribute to the labour market in the country in which they live by working and paying taxes is a fundamental requirement for every democratic society. Unfortunately, that right is not in force, owing to the racist, conservative economic policies that we increasingly see in Europe today.

Europe is richer than ever, and yet we have high unemployment rates, especially among marginalised communities in some countries. We would rather have tax cuts for the rich, subsidising their lavish lifestyles, than invest in improving the social and economic conditions of the most vulnerable. In our economic system there has been a step-by-step dismantling of the welfare state and workers' rights, while labour unions are perceived as the gatekeepers that prevent the greedy corporate capitalists from eating the whole cake. There is a fundamental error with our economic system.

Contrary to the hateful narrative regarding migrants or people of colour, who some say come to Europe but do not want to work, most people I know want a decent, well-paid, quality job. For people who are black, Roma, Muslim, a migrant from within or outside Europe, have a disability or are a woman, discrimination is a major obstacle, not only for those looking for a job but for those in a job.

A report was published in Sweden about two months ago on the conditions in the labour market of people of African descent living in Sweden. It showed something quite extraordinary: that the more educated they are, the bigger their pay gap from the general population. For a person of African descent with a primary school or high school certificate, the pay gap between them and the general population will be lower. However, for a person of African descent in Sweden with a PhD, the pay gap will be higher. That does not make sense. They are educated, yet they are unacceptably disadvantaged.

This is fundamental: when we exclude people, we all lose. If two seeds of the same kind are sown in the same place on the same day, and a wall is built between them, with only one side having rain and sunshine, the one for which the necessary conditions to grow are provided will grow and blossom. Even though the other is of the same quality, it will struggle to grow, and we will all lose. We have to break down that wall, build bridges and include everybody, so that we can all win.

Lord Don TOUHIG (United Kingdom, SOC): I thank the two rapporteurs for all their hard work in preparing these two most welcome reports. This debate affords us an opportunity to highlight the employment of some of our fellow citizens who are often left by the wayside, particularly those on the autism spectrum.

One European in every 100 is on the spectrum. Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how people communicate and interact with the world, but it should not be considered a life sentence. People on the spectrum can and do enjoy happy and fulfilled lives. However, for so many, the big challenge comes when their education is over and they need a job. More than 80% of people with autism never get a full-time job. Imagine the outcry if that was any other group. If 80% of people of a different colour, religion or sexual orientation could not get a job, everyone in this Chamber would protest and demand change.

Imagine being autistic and applying for a job. Job descriptions always say that candidates must have strong communication skills, good personal skills and be able to work in a team environment. However, autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently from other people. Traditional recruitment and work practices understandably require skills assessments, but by their very nature they can discriminate against people with autism.

Most autistic people want the opportunity to work. The key to this is flexibility, and realising the opportunities that autistic employees bring to any organisation: autistic adults have many skills and abilities that make them valuable assets to any employer. With a few small steps, employers can make huge strides towards helping people with autism get and retain the jobs they deserve. Businesses can play their part by making simple changes to become autism-friendly employers including: introducing appropriate working strategies; breaking down large tasks into small ones; giving colleagues on the spectrum time and space if they seem anxious; offering to provide a mentor; or providing autism awareness training for their staff. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work in this respect.

It really does not take much thought to be sensitive and offer proper job opportunities and good management to people with autism. The human rights of an autistic person are no less important than the human rights we all enjoy. I am sure everybody agrees with that.

Mr Yunus EMRE (Turkey, SOC): I thank both rapporteurs, Mr Damien THIÉRY and Mr Adão SILVA, for their work. Obstacles faced by people with disabilities and the discrimination they experience in accessing employment are two crucial problems widely encountered in many Member States. Furthermore, these two problems are so substantial that they obstruct the full inclusion of a certain category of society. Along with the

many important points underlined in both reports, I highlight that these issues are not only political but sociological, economic and psychological. Just adopting and implementing certain policies, regulations and sanctions would not be adequate without taking these different aspects into consideration.

In this manner, I attach great importance to certain measures suggested by the reports, namely: fighting against negative stereotyping; giving greater importance to reserved, protected and sheltered jobs; inclusive employment policies; and making direct and indirect methods for fighting against discrimination a political priority. Political discourse has an undeniable influence on discrimination. Political agents, especially rising far-right political movements, tighten the noose with their discriminatory, marginalising and polarising discourse against race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, social origin or association with a national minority. While bringing these matters to the table, we must consider the destructive impact of such discourse.

These challenges must be addressed by the international community. In this context, we should find effective humanitarian policies to fight against discrimination and the obstacles faced by people with disabilities. Finally, there is no doubt that the right to work is a fundamental right. In order to sustain and consolidate this right, we must have strong and influential political instruments. I once again thank the rapporteurs for their work.

Ms Ganira PASHAYEVA (Azerbaijan, FDG): I congratulate the rapporteurs. I support the calls made to Member States in the reports and emphasise that we focus on these issues in my country. As mentioned by my colleague Ms Sahiba GAFAROVA, education, employment and improving the social status of people with disabilities are among the priorities of the state. Serious work is being carried out at both legislative and governmental levels.

As members know, as a result of Armenia's occupation of 20% of Azerbaijani territory, thousands of people have lost their health. It has also played a major role in the significant increase in the number of people with disabilities. At the same time, thousands of people among the 1 million internally displaced persons forcedly displaced by Armenia have become disabled, having lost their health due to the horrors they lived through. Their education, employment and social status is one of the most important issues for the state. Unfortunately, European organisations, including our Organisation, have not protested strongly against the occupation policy of Armenia, which has caused thousands of Azerbaijanis to become disabled, and have not taken the necessary steps to stop this process.

A number of legislative changes have been made to improve the employment of disabled people in Azerbaijan. Thus, one in every 25 employees in both the public and private sectors is disabled, and reduced working hours for persons with disabilities, which do not exceed 36 hours a week, are strictly accounted for by employers. Each year hundreds of disabled people are provided with free housing.

As mentioned in the report, and taking into account the crucial role played by non-governmental organisations in the promotion of disabled people's participation in the labour market, the support for such organisations in terms of financial resources should be increased in Member States. My country, Azerbaijan, pays special attention to this issue. Financial support is provided for the activities of non-governmental organisations engaged in disabled-established and disability-related projects. Every year, financial support is rendered to non-governmental organisations for the implementation of hundreds of projects with disabled people through the NGO Support Council, under the president's Youth Foundation and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population. However, despite the work that has been done, the importance of improving the rights, education and employment of disabled people is always on the agenda. A lot of serious work has been done to make changes to the law on these issues and to adopt new government programmes. We will pay close attention to the issues related to the calls in the draft resolution and we support this document.

Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ (Turkey, NR): I thank the rapporteur for enabling us to discuss this important issue, given the current era of increasing xenophobia, discrimination, racism and Islamophobia – problems that threaten the harmony of humanity and civilization.

In general, any form of discrimination that affects millions of its citizens living abroad is an important issue for Turkey. There has recently been a marked increase in discriminatory and exclusionary movements faced by Turkish people living in many European countries. In today's world, the most developed countries in the West have become immigrant countries, with highly diversified labour forces. Unfortunately, one of the most disadvantaged groups in those immigrant countries is that of Muslim women. As the report states, many Muslim women in Europe suffer from multiple discrimination in accessing employment on the grounds of

gender, religion and ethnicity. Let me underline that excluding Muslim women from the labour force has serious social and economic consequences in the receiving countries. It is the government's responsibility to be a role model for other sectors by employing more Muslim women in the public sector.

As you are well aware, my dear colleagues, discrimination in employment has recently increased. Various discriminatory practices in areas of social policy, such as employment and education, are triggering the isolation of migrant people and communities. This has a negative impact on their integration and participation efforts. These trends also make it difficult for migrants to adapt and integrate into countries where they live and where they have a sincere desire to live for years to come. In Turkey, we are very much aware of the obligation that these facts impose on the executive in all countries to deal with such issues rigorously, precisely and sincerely, in order to successfully eliminate discrimination in accessing employment. I sincerely believe that our Assembly will make efficient contributions towards eliminating discrimination in employment, thanks to the sensibility and efforts of our members.

Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK (Turkey, FDG): I congratulate both rapporteurs on their excellent work. The findings and recommendations in the report deserve the utmost consideration of Member States in creating an inclusive, accessible and safe working environment for persons with disabilities and for increasing their employment in both the private and public sectors. Building on the recommendations in the second report, I want to bring some critical issues to the Assembly's attention.

First, the report mentions that in multiple instances there is a lack of systematically collected statistical data on the participation of persons with disabilities in the work force at the national level and an absence of comparable disaggregated data in this respect. As a result, the analysis in the report is based on data received from the national human rights institutions of some Member States. Data collection is an important factor in monitoring the situation of people with disabilities and addressing the barriers they face, as it provides clarity on what the real issues are and a basis for appropriate responses. Reliable data on the participation of persons with disabilities in the work force is necessary to articulate the magnitude of the problem and to develop and implement accurate and tailor-made policies, recommendations and measures at the national and international levels to increase their rate of employment and restore their hope for a meaningful future.

In that context, I believe that one of the most critical recommendations in the report is for the Assembly to encourage Member States to systematically collect data on the employment of persons with disabilities and to share such data with the relevant international institutions. It is essential that Member States adopt a uniform disability data collection and measurement approach and that the data collected is disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age and type of disability due to the existence of different obstacles in accessing employment for each group, along with the different remedies required to overcome them.

It is important to reiterate that discrimination against persons with disabilities is a human rights violation and that monitoring compliance of the relevant conventions should be reinforced. In the light of the prevalence of gender, religious and racial discrimination in accessing education and employment in several Member States, it is essential to analyse and address the state of discrimination of persons with disabilities in this context. Specifically, given the rise of populist movements with anti-immigration platforms in Europe, the Assembly should also keep an eye on discrimination against migrants and refugees with disabilities.

Finally, it is important to remember that the family life of persons with disabilities can have a significant impact on their participation in the work force and on workplace efficiency. Families should be guided, supported and, if necessary, trained to assist persons with disabilities. This work strand can be implemented through social programmes and non-governmental organisations and can contribute to addressing the wider challenge more comprehensively.

Ms Ulviyye AGHAYEVA (Azerbaijan, FDG): I thank both rapporteurs for touching on such sensible issues. The full inclusion of persons with disabilities is the basis of the international legal and policy framework in the area of human rights and disability. All of us here today have heard different opinions about a disability-inclusive work force and how persons with disabilities encounter multiple obstacles in accessing and participating in the labour market. However, the main question is, how can we better work together and learn from each other to achieve tangible progress?

Nowadays, the lack of accessibility, discrimination and negative stereotyping hinder the participation of persons with disabilities in the work force. This lack of participation creates a democratic gap by undermining the rule of law and diminishing the basic principles of good governance. The social exclusion of people with disabilities harms our societies as a whole. Unfortunately, persons with disabilities encounter discrimination

and exclusion on a daily basis, which includes pervasive exclusion from development programmes, health care services, education, social protection programmes, employment, infrastructure, information, transport services, and so on and so forth. Despite all the actions taken by different organisations, the employment rate of persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors remains unsatisfactory.

The first thing that must be done is to change the perception of people with disabilities and the prevailing stereotypes. This in turn requires ensuring independence, freedom of choice and the full and active participation of disabled people in all areas of life and society. Their full and effective participation in public life results in a more inclusive, equal and peaceful society, which acknowledges diversity and values the contributions of all members of any given community. In the workplace, this means providing the necessary support and accommodations, so that people can be productive to the greatest extent possible. We should collaborate in the creation of an inclusive society and ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are realised, if there is to be true inclusion.

However, we must acknowledge that policies alone are not enough to build an inclusive workplace. There must be practical solutions to help integrate people with disabilities into the work force, as well as to improve our workplace for everyone. The engagement of the private sector is necessary. Investing in those people, improving reasonable adjustment accommodation guidelines and encouraging businesses to diversify their workforce is important as well. Instead of enforcing sanctions, we have to create incentives. By creating apprenticeship schemes, entrepreneurship and training opportunities, I am pretty sure that the narrative about people with disabilities could change.

We need to look at fresh approaches to achieving equal opportunities in employment for people with disabilities. We should all play our part in creating a more inclusive society – one in which all people, whether disabled or not, are treated equally and have the same opportunities and rights.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR, President of the Assembly)*: That concludes the list of speakers.

Mister Silva, you have the floor and you have three and a half minutes.

Mr Adão SILVA (Portugal, EPP/CD, Rapporteur)*: Thank you, colleagues, for your contributions, especially those who contributed to the drafting of the report. I underline that you have said some wonderful things, which have very much dovetailed with what I said in the report, and I thank you for that. Nevertheless, I reiterate that the participation of disabled people in the work force is a precondition for their full involvement in society. Various measures are necessary to encourage the participation of disabled people in the world of work. They may have all sorts of different handicaps – psychosocial, physical and so on. They need equality and a change in the attitude of employers. That is perhaps the most important thing: to change the mindset of employers.

I also stress the importance of a free, egalitarian, inclusive society, where everyone has a role to play and everybody's skills are recognised. Whenever we talk about disability and the work force, we must also stress people's skills, their strengths and how they can be fully involved. We defend human rights and democratic society, but if we do not intensify our efforts to ensure the inclusion of disabled people in society, we cannot really claim to be effective defenders of human rights.

I conclude by thanking my colleagues from the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, who have made a major input to the report, the Secretariat, and particularly Ms Elodie FISCHER, who helped me so much in this work.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR, President of the Assembly)*: Thank you. Mister Thiéry, you have four minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr Damien THIÉRY (Belgium, ALDE, Rapporteur)*: I start by thanking all those who have spoken for the high quality of their contributions and the information they provided this evening. On the basis of what has been said, I can see that my report could have been further improved but, of course, nothing is perfect. What we know for certain is that there is a lot of enthusiasm for this subject; it is not just up to employers.

Another fundamental point that I would make is that it is clear that there is a link between the problem of discrimination in access to work and discrimination at work. Many colleagues raised that. The goal of our report was to work on a specific aspect of this: access to work. Obviously, we need to give examples, such as

the fact that unemployment means that people are unable even to apply for a job, given the discrimination. It is a nexus of problems, of which we took one aspect and that was access. It was important that the report focused on a particular element.

Another thing that I have taken away from this discussion is a kind of paradox that is a fundamental element of this. Vulnerability does not prevent people being able to work. There are people who are socially extremely vulnerable but who are very competent and able to work. We need a different approach to people who apply for a job.

There is also an illusion to do with autism. Autism is a pathology in one way but can be very positive. Autistic people have specific skills, which employers require. It is very important that there should be an awareness of this. Many people talk about the right to work being a fundamental right, which is rarely respected.

Over the years, the Council of Europe has shown that it is fully committed to anti-discrimination in many of its instruments, but discrimination still exists in many Member States. This does not just mean that people are excluded from the labour market; there is also a waste of potential for society. I know that I was very much aware of that when I was in the world of business. It is essential that we tackle discrimination in the attitude of employers and the other general measures implemented by states.

Taken together, the work will contribute to a constant effort to get rid of discrimination. I turn here to Mr Adão SILVA and suggest that we go back to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, all its members and the Secretariat and tell them how grateful we are. It is thanks to their work that this has been a very fruitful exercise and has yielded this important report. Our chair has always encouraged us and, thanks to that encouragement, we have been able to achieve what we have. I also thank someone else who is not here but who was also very supportive of our work in bringing home how important diversity is to the thinking of Member States. It provides richness, with everyone having their own skills and competences, even though we are so different and have different origins.

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR, President of the Assembly)*: Thank you. Would the chair of the committee care to respond?

Ms Elvira KOVÁCS (Serbia, EPP/CD): Yes. As we have heard today, access to employment is one of the most important means of inclusion for all members of our societies, yet many people are excluded from the labour market entirely or have much greater difficulty accessing it because of discrimination. We examined these questions in depth in our committee and, as we have heard, we held two hearings in the Sub-Committee on Disability, Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination, seeking out best practice on which all states can usefully draw.

Mr Damien THIÉRY has focused on the measures that governments can take to influence both public and private employers to put an end to discriminatory practices, whatever the grounds for discrimination, and make their recruitment processes more inclusive. Mr Adão SILVA has analysed obstacles faced by persons with disabilities when seeking employment or when already employed. He has worked on concrete recommendations that can help to improve the participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce, an essential element for their full inclusion in society. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination unanimously adopted these two draft resolutions and, on behalf of the whole committee, I would like to thank both of you for your tremendous work on these important issues.

Dear colleagues, I call on all of you not only to support these resolutions wholeheartedly tonight, but to take up these issues in your own national parliaments. Only with support and efforts at the national level can we start to make a real difference and a real change in practice, in order to overcome discrimination in access to employment for all those affected and create a disability-inclusive workforce.

Vote: Discrimination in access to employment / For a disability-inclusive workforce

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR, President of the Assembly)*: The debate is closed.

We now come to the first of the two resolutions we have to consider, which is “Discrimination in access to employment”, Document 14666.

The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has presented a draft resolution, to which four amendments have been tabled.

The amendments will be taken individually in the order in which they appear in the Compendium. I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds.

We come to Amendment 1. I call Mr Jaak MADISON to support the amendment. He is not here. Is any other signatory to these amendments here? No. In that case, the amendments will not be moved.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 14666. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The draft resolution in Document 14666 is adopted, with 54 votes for, 1 against and 3 abstentions.

We now come to the second resolution we have to consider, which is "For a disability-inclusive workforce", Document 14665.

The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has presented a draft resolution, to which two amendments have been tabled.

The amendments will be taken in the order set out in the Compendium. I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds.

I assume that Mr Jaak MADISON is still not here and that nor are any of the other signatories to the amendments. The amendments are not moved.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document 14665. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The draft resolution in Document 14665 is adopted, with 55 votes for, 1 against and 1 abstention.

Next public business

Ms Nicole TRISSE (France, NR, President of the Assembly)*: The Assembly will hold its next public sitting tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

The sitting is closed.